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Maigret's first case

Simenon



Maigret's First Case

LA PREMIÈRE ENQUÊTE DE MAIGRET, 1913
THE 57TH EPISODE IN THE MAIGRET SAGA
1949

Georges Simenon

Translated from the French by Robert Brain

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Maigret And The Old Lady

Maigret's First Case

Maigret Takes A Room

A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book

Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

NEW YORK

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Simenon

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MAIGRET'S FIRST CASE

Chapter I

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A black railing divided the room in two. In the part reserved for the public there was only the one backless bench, also painted black, against a whitewashed wall covered with official notices. On the other side were some desks, with inkstands, pigeon-holes filled with bulky files, which were black too, so that everything was black and white. The most obvious thing, standing on a sheet of metal, was a cast-iron stove, the sort only to be seen nowadays in small town railway stations, with a pipe which first climbed up towards the ceiling, then bent round, going right across the room before disappearing into the wall.

The baby-faced constable, who had unbuttoned his uniform and was trying to go to sleep, was Lecoœur.

The clock-face, set in a round black frame, showed twenty-five past one. Every so often, the single gas jet would sputter. Every so often, too, the stove, for no apparent reason, would begin to snore.

Outside, the peace of the night was occasionally disturbed by the noise of rockets, becoming less and less frequent now; or by the singing of a drunkard, or a cab passing down the sloping street.

At the left-hand desk, the secretary of the Saint-Georges Police Station was moving his lips like a schoolboy, as he bent over a booklet which had just come out: *Course on Official Reports (Oral Description) for the use of Inspectors and Police Officers*.

In violet ink, on the flyleaf, was written, in a copper-plate hand: J. Maigret.

Three times already during the course of the night, the young station secretary had got up to go and poke the stove, and he was to feel nostalgic about that stove for the rest of his life ; he would later find the same one, or one very similar, at

the Quai des Orfèvres, and in due course when central heating was installed at Police Headquarters, Chief-Divisional-Inspector Maigret, chief of the special squad, would manage to have it kept on in his office.

It was the 15th of April, 1913. Paris Police Headquarters was then still known as the Sûreté. That morning a foreign monarch had arrived in great pomp at Longchamps Station, and the President of the Republic had been there to welcome him. Official landaus, flanked by the National Guard in full dress uniform, had paraded down the Avenue du Bois and along the Champs-Élysées, between two lines of flags and people.

There had been a gala performance at the Opéra, fireworks, processions, and the sound of public revelry had only now begun to quieten down.

The police were exhausted. In spite of the precautions taken, the preventive arrests, the arrangements made with certain allegedly dangerous individuals, there was the risk of an anarchist's bomb right up to the last moment.

Maigret and Police-Constable Lecoeur were alone in the Saint-Georges Police Station, in the quiet Rue La Rochefoucauld.

Both of them looked up when they heard hurried steps on the pavement outside. The door opened. A young man, out of breath, stared around him, dazzled by the gaslight.

"The superintendent?" he asked, panting.

"I'm his secretary," Maigret said, not moving from his chair.

He didn't then realize that this was the beginning of his first case.

The man was fair-haired, weedy, with blue eyes and a pink complexion. He was wearing an oilskin mackintosh over a black suit and held a bowler hat in one hand, while with the other he kept dabbing at a bruised and swollen nose.

"Has some hooligan attacked you?"

“No. I was trying to go to the rescue of a woman who had called for help.”

“In the street?”

“In a house in the Rue Chaptal. I think you’d better go there straight away. They threw me out.”

“Who did?”

“A sort of butler or porter.”

“Don’t you think you’d better begin at the beginning? What were you doing in the Rue Chaptal?”

“I was coming back from work. My name is Justin Miriard. I’m second flautist in the Concerts Lamoureux, but in the evening I play at the Brasserie Clichy, in the Boulevard de Clichy. I live in the Rue d’Enghien just opposite the “Petit Parisien”. I was going home by way of the Rue Ballu, then the Rue Chaptal, the same as every night.”

Very much the conscientious clerk, Maigret was taking notes.

“About half-way down the street, which is almost always deserted, I noticed a motor-car parked, a De Dion Bouton, with its engine still running. In the driving seat there was a man in a grey goatskin jacket, his face almost entirely hidden by enormous goggles. When I was just about level with him, somebody opened a window on the second floor.”

“Did you notice the number of the house?”

“17A. It’s a private house with a gateway. There were no lights in any of the other windows. Only the second window from the left, the one that had been opened, had a light on. I looked up and saw the figure of a woman who was trying to lean out, shouting ‘Help!’ ”

“What did you do?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute. Somebody who was in the room must have pulled her back. At the same moment a shot rang out. I turned towards the motor I had just passed and it suddenly drove off.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t the engine back-firing you heard?”

“I’m positive. Then I went to the door and rang the bell.”

“You were all by yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Armed?”

“No.”

“What did you intend doing?”

“Well...”

The flautist was so baffled by the question he could think of nothing to say. Were it not for his fair moustache and his few wisps of beard, he would not have looked more than sixteen.

“The neighbours didn’t hear anything?”

“Apparently not.”

“Was the door opened?”

“Not straight away. I rang at least three times. Then I kicked at the door. At last I heard footsteps, a chain being lifted, a bolt drawn. There was no light in the porch, but there’s a gas-lamp just in front of the house.”

One forty-seven. Now and then the flautist glanced anxiously at the clock.

“A big fellow, all in black like a butler, asked me what I wanted.”

“Was he fully dressed?”

“Oh yes.”

“With starched shirt and tie?”

“Yes.”

“And yet there were no lights on in the house?”

“Except in the room on the second floor.”

“What did you say?”

“I can’t remember. I tried to get past him.”

“Why?”

“To go and have a look. He was barring my way. I told him about the woman who had called out from the window.”

“Did he seem uneasy?”

“He glared at me angrily, without saying a word, and pushed me back with all his strength.”

“Then what?”

“He growled that I must have been dreaming, that I was drunk. I can’t remember what else exactly, and then I heard a voice from the darkness, which seemed to be coming from the first floor landing.”

“What did it say?”

“*Hurry up, Louis!*”

“After that?”

“He shoved me even harder, and when I resisted he punched me right in the face. I found myself back in the street with the door shut behind me.”

“Was the light still on on the second floor?”

“No.”

“The motor had not come back?”

“No. Wouldn’t it be better if we went there now?”

“We? You’re thinking of coming with me?”

It was comic and touching at the same time, the contrast between the flautist’s almost feminine frailty and his completely determined manner.

“I was the one who got hit in the face, wasn’t I? I’m going to lodge a complaint, in any case.”

“You’re certainly entitled to do so.”

“But don’t you think it would be better to leave that till later?”

“Did you tell me the number of the house?”

“17A.”

Maigret frowned, as this address sounded vaguely familiar. He pulled a directory from a pigeon-hole, leafed through it, and the name he read made him frown even more.

He was wearing his frock-coat that evening. It was the first frock-coat he had ever had. A memorandum had been sent around a few days previously advising all auxiliary police to be suitably dressed for a formal occasion during the royal visit, because one of them might be required at any moment to mix with the official party.

His oilskin mackintosh, bought off the peg, was the twin of the one Justin Minard was wearing.

“Come on! If anybody asks for me, Lecoœur, tell them I’ll be back soon.”

He was feeling a little awe-struck. The name he had just read in the directory was not one to set him at ease.

He was twenty-six and had been married only five months. Since he had joined the force four years ago, he had been through the humblest of its branches, street duty, railway stations, big stores, and he had been secretary at the Saint-Georges District Police Station for almost a year.

And the most distinguished name in the whole district was that of the people living at 17A, Rue Chaptal.

Gendreau-Balthazar. Balthazar Coffee. The name that was spelt out in big brown letters along all the métro subways. And in the streets, the House of Balthazar vans, each drawn by four superbly harnessed horses, almost formed part of the Parisian scene.

Maigret drank Balthazar coffee. And whenever he walked along the Avenue de l’Opéra, at a certain point, next door to a gunsmith’s, he never failed to sniff at the good smell of coffee being roasted in the window of the Balthazar shop.

The night was clear and cold. There was not a soul walking along the sloping street, not a cab anywhere near. Maigret was almost as thin as the flautist, in those days, and they looked

like a couple of lanky adolescents as they climbed up the street.

“I suppose you’ve not been drinking.”

“I never drink. Doctor’s orders.”

“You’re sure you saw a window open?”

“I’m absolutely positive.”

It was the first time Maigret had had to fend for himself. Up till now he had merely accompanied his chief, Monsieur Le Bret, that most worldly of all Paris superintendents, on certain police raids, four of which had been to establish proof of adultery.

The Rue Chaptal was as deserted as the Rue Rochefoucauld. There was no light showing at the Gendreau-Balthazars’, one of the finest houses in the neighbourhood.

“You said you saw a motor parked here?”

“Yes. Just there.”

Not quite in front of the gates. A little farther on. Maigret, his head full of the latest theories about finding clues, lit a match and bent over the wooden blocks of the roadway.

“You see!” the musician said, triumphantly, pointing at a large patch of blackish oil.

“Come on. I don’t think it’s quite proper for you to accompany me.”

“But I was the one who got punched on the nose!”

It was rather terrifying, all the same. As he raised his hand to press the bell, Maigret’s chest felt tight, and he wondered what regulation he was going to rely on. He had no warrant. Could he very well talk about a flagrant breach of the law, when the only evidence he could produce was a flautist’s swollen nose?

Like the latter he had to ring three times, though he did not have to kick at the door before a voice inside asked, at last:

“Who is it?”

“The police!” he replied, in a not very firm voice.

“One moment please. I’ll go and fetch the key.”

They heard a click inside the porch. The house had electricity already. Then they had to wait a long time.

“That’s the one,” the musician told him, recognizing the voice.

At last the chain, the bolt, a face which looked half-asleep, a glance which passed over Maigret and fixed itself on Justin Minard.

“So you’ve caught him!” the man said. “I suppose he’s been carrying on his little game somewhere else?”

“May we come in?”

“If you think it absolutely necessary. I only ask you not to make a noise and wake up the whole household. Come through here.”

On the left, at the top of three marble steps, there was a double glass door which opened into a columned hall. It was the first time in Maigret’s life that he had ever been in a place as sumptuous as this. Its proportions made him think of the grandeur of a government building.

“Is your name Louis?”

“How do you know that?”

Louis, at all events, pushed open the door, not into one of the drawing-rooms, but into a kind of office. He was not wearing his butler’s clothes. He looked as though he had just got out of bed and hurriedly pulled on a pair of trousers over a white nightshirt with a red embroidered collar.

“Is Monsieur Gendreau-Balthazar in?”

“Which one? The father or the son?”

“The father.”

“Monsieur Félicien has not come in yet. As for Monsieur Richard, his son, he must have been in bed for ages. It was just over half an hour ago that this drunk...”

Louis was tall and well-built. He was probably about forty-five, his shaven chin was blueish, the pupils of his eyes very dark, his black eyebrows abnormally thick.

Feeling as if he were jumping into the sea, Maigret swallowed hard and said :

“I should like to speak to Monsieur Richard.”

“You want me to wake him up?”

“If you please.”

“Will you show me your card?”

Maigret held out his Prefecture of Police card.

“Have you been in this district long?”

“Ten months.”

“You’re attached to the Saint-Georges Police Station?”

“That’s right.”

“Then you know Monsieur Le Bret?”

“He’s my chief.”

Then Louis said, with an assumed air of indifference which barely concealed a threat:

“I know him too. I have the honour of waiting on him whenever he comes here to luncheon or dinner.”

He paused for a second, gazing into space.

“You still want me to wake Monsieur Richard?”

“Yes.”

“Have you brought a warrant?”

“No.”

“Very well then. Please wait here.”

Before he went, he took a stiff shirt from a cupboard, a collar and a black tie. Then he put on his evening suit, which was hanging up.

There was no chair in the office. Neither Maigret nor Justin was able to sit down. They were engulfed in silence. The whole house was steeped in semi-darkness and silence. It was very solemn, very awesome.

Twice Maigret pulled his watch from his waistcoat pocket. Twenty minutes went by before Louis reappeared, as icy as before.

“If you will be kind enough to follow me...”

Minard tried to go along behind Maigret, but the butler turned to him.

“Not you. Unless you belong to the police force too.”

Maigret was feeling a little ridiculous. It seemed cowardly to leave the pale flautist behind. The office with its dark panelling reminded him momentarily of a dungeon, and he had a vision of the butler going back there to work on his victim.

In Louis’s footsteps he crossed the columned hall and began to climb the dark, red-carpeted staircase.

Only a few lamps, with yellowish filaments, were alight, leaving large areas of darkness. One of the doors off the first-floor landing stood open. A man in a dressing-gown was framed in the light from the room.

“I’ve been told you wish to have a word with me? Please come in. That will be all, Louis.”

The room served both as a living-room and an office, with its leather-covered walls, the smell of a Havana cigar and of a scent which Maigret could not recognize. A door, ajar, led into a bedroom where the bedclothes of a four-poster were disarranged.

Richard Gendreau-Balthazar was wearing pyjamas under his dressing-gown, and he had put on a pair of Russian leather slippers over his bare feet.

He must have been about thirty. He was dark, and his face would have been unremarkable but for a crooked nose.

“Louis tells me you’re from the local police station?”

He opened an embossed cigarette box and pushed it towards his visitor who declined to take one.

“You don’t smoke?”

“Only my pipe.”

“Well, I shan’t ask you to smoke that here, because I loathe the smell of a pipe. I presume you telephoned my friend Le Bret before coming here?”

“No.”

“Ah! You must forgive me if I’m not well versed in the general procedure in your profession. Le Bret has often come to the house, but not, I must tell you at once, in his capacity as superintendent of police. He is so unlike one, anyway. He is a particularly nice man, and his wife is charming. But let’s get to the point. What is the time?”

He made a business of looking in vain for his watch and it was Maigret who took his huge silver ‘turnip’ from his pocket.

“Twenty-five past two.”

“And at this time of the year it gets light about five o’clock, doesn’t it? I know, because I sometimes ride very early in the Bois. I thought a man’s house was inviolable from sunset to sunrise.”

“That’s true, but...”

He cut Maigret short.

“Of course I only mention it as a reminder. You’re young and probably new in your profession. You’ve been lucky to hit upon a friend of your chief. And I imagine you have good reasons for coming into the house as you have done. Louis told me something of it. Perhaps the character he threw out is dangerous? Even so, my friend, you could have waited until the morning, don’t you think? Please sit down.”

He himself remained standing, walking up and down the room, puffing out the smoke from his gold-tipped Egyptian cigarette.

“Now that I’ve given you the little lesson you deserved, tell me what you would like to know.”

“Who has the room on the floor above, the second window on the left?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’m sorry. I know you’re not obliged to answer, at least not now.”

“Obliged to...?” Richard repeated, in great astonishment.

And Maigret, his ears crimson:

“Somebody fired a shot in that room tonight.”

“What are you saying?... I trust you’re in your right mind... I know it’s been a night of public merrymaking, but I presume at least that you have not been drinking more than you should?”

Footsteps could be heard on the staircase. The door had been left open, and Maigret saw a new figure silhouetted on the landing, a figure which might have come straight from the cover of the *Vie Parisienne*. The man was wearing a dress suit, a cloak and an opera hat. He was thin and old, and his trim moustache with its upturned points was obviously dyed.

He stood there on the threshold, hesitant, surprised, perhaps frightened.

“Come in, Father. I think you’ll be amused. This gentleman is one of Le Bret’s employees...”

It was odd; Félicien Gendreau-Balthazar, the father, could not have been drunk, and yet there was something vague, insubstantial, something fluttery about him.

“Did you see Louis?” his son asked.

“He’s downstairs with somebody.”

“Exactly. A short while ago a drunk—that is, if he isn’t a lunatic escaped from Villejuif—almost broke down the front gate. Louis went downstairs and had the greatest difficulty in preventing him getting in. Now, here is Monsieur...”

He paused, expecting an answer.

“Maigret.”

“Monsieur Maigret, who is our old friend Le Bret’s secretary, has come here to ask... Indeed, what exactly is it you wish to know?”

“Who the person is who has the room on the floor above, the one with the window second from the left.”

He thought the father was nervous, but it was an odd sort of nervousness. For example, ever since he appeared, the father had been looking at his son as if scared, almost submissive. He didn’t dare open his mouth. He seemed to be waiting for Richard’s permission.

“My sister,” the latter said at last. “There’s your information.”

“Is she there now?”

And Maigret was addressing the father, not the son. But, once more, it was the son who replied.

“No. She’s at Anseval.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Our château, the Château d’Anseval, near Pouilly-sur-Loire, in the Nièvre.”

“Then the room is empty.”

“I’ve every reason to believe so.”

He added, ironically:

“I suppose you’ll want to make sure? I’ll come with you. Then tomorrow I’ll be able to congratulate our friend Le Bret on his subordinates’ zeal. Please follow me.”

To Maigret’s surprise the father followed as well, rather timidly.

“This is the room you’ve been talking about. Luckily, it’s not locked.”

He switched on the light. The bedroom furniture was in white-enamelled wood, the walls hung with blue silk. A side

door opened on to a boudoir, and everything was in order, every object seemed to be in its place.

“Carry out your investigations, I beg you. My sister will be delighted to hear that the police have been pawing over her things.”

Determined not to be put off, Maigret went up to the window. The thick silk curtains were of a deeper blue than the walls. He pulled them aside, discovered a net curtain designed to soften the daylight and noticed that a corner of this curtain had been caught in the window.

“I suppose nobody’s been in here this evening?” he said.

“Not unless one of the chambermaids...”

“Are there many in the house?”

“Of course,” Richard replied sarcastically. “We’ve got two, Germaine and Marie. And there’s Louis’s wife, our cook, and we’ve even got a woman to look after the linen, but she’s married and only comes in during the day.”

Félicien Gendreau, the father, kept looking from one to the other of them.

“What’s going on?” he asked at last, after giving a slight cough.

“I’m not quite certain. Ask Monsieur Maigret.”

“Someone who was going past the house just before half past one heard this window suddenly flung open. He looked up and saw a panic-stricken woman calling for help.”

He saw the father’s hand tighten on the gold knob of his cane.

“And then what?” Richard asked.

“The woman was pulled back and just at that moment a shot was fired.”

“Really?”

The younger Gendreau looked about him with a false air of anxiety, pretending to search for the mark of a bullet in the silk

on the walls.

“What surprises me, Monsieur Maigret—it is Maigret, isn’t it?— is that, having such a serious accusation to make, you didn’t take the elementary precaution of warning your superiors. It seems to me that you’ve come running along here without due consideration. Did you even make any inquiries about this passer-by who has such a fertile imagination?”

“He’s downstairs.”

“It gives me great pleasure to know he’s under my roof. In fact, you have not only come into the house in the middle of the night, scorning the laws which protect a citizen’s liberty, but you have brought along with you an individual whom, to say the least, I consider to be rather shady. Nevertheless, since you are here, and so that you will be able to give a complete report to our friend Le Bret tomorrow, I implore you to carry out your usual petty investigations. I suppose you want to make sure the bed has not been slept in tonight?”

He pulled back the satin coverlet, revealing faultlessly folded sheets, an immaculate pillow.

“Have a look round, I insist. Sniff in the corners. I presume you’ve brought a magnifying-glass with you?”

“It’s not necessary.”

“I beg your pardon. Apart from Le Bret, I haven’t had the privilege of getting to know the police except from novels. A shot was fired, you say? Perhaps there’s a body somewhere. Follow me. Let’s search for it together! In this cupboard? Who knows?”

He opened it, and one could see nothing but dresses on hangers.

“In here? These are Lise’s shoes. She’s mad about shoes, as you can see. Let’s go through to the boudoir...”

He was tense, becoming more and more sarcastic.

“This door? It’s been nailed up since my mother died. But we can get into the suite from the passage. But of course, I beseech you...”

That half-hour was a nightmare. Maigret had no choice but to obey. Richard literally ordered him around. And their wanderings about the large house were made almost ghostly by the presence of the elder Gendreau-Balthazar, dogging their heels, still wearing his opera hat, his cloak over his shoulders, his gold cane in his hand.

“No. We don’t go downstairs yet. You’re forgetting there’s a floor above us, an attic storey, where the servants sleep.”

The bulbs in the corridor had no shades. There was a sloping ceiling. Richard knocked at each door.

“Open the door, Germaine. Come along! It doesn’t matter if you’re in your nightdress. It’s the police.”

A sleepy-eyed, rather plump girl, with a stale smell about her, a clammy bed, a comb full of hairs on the dressing table.

“Did you hear a shot fired?”

“A what?”

“How long have you been in bed?”

“I came upstairs at ten o’clock.”

“And you didn’t hear anything?”

It was Richard who was putting the questions.

“On to the next...! Open up, Marie... No, my dear that doesn’t matter...”

A young girl, about sixteen, who had wrapped a green cloak over her nightdress and was shaking in every limb.

“Did you hear a shot fired?”

She looked at Richard and at Maigret almost in terror.

“Have you been asleep long?”

“I don’t know.”

“Have you heard anything?”

“No. Why? What’s happening?”

“Any questions, Monsieur Maigret?”

“I should like to ask her where she comes from.”

“Where do you come from, Marie?”

“From Anseval.”

“And Germaine?”

“From Anseval, too.”

“And Louis?”

“From Anseval, Monsieur Maigret,” Richard replied sarcastically. “I see you’re not aware that people who own a château usually bring their servants up from the country.”

“The next door?”

“Madame Louis’s room.”

“Does her husband sleep there too?”

“He sleeps downstairs in the lodge.”

Madame Louis took longer to open the door. She was short, swarthy, very fat, with mistrustful eyes.

“How much longer are you going to make all this row? Where’s Louis?”

“Downstairs. Tell me, did you hear a shot fired?”

She almost threw them out of the room, mumbling furious phrases. And they still went on opening doors, into empty bedrooms, lumber rooms, attics. They didn’t even spare Maigret the garret, after which he had to go down to the first floor to see both the son’s and the father’s apartments.

“Now there are only the drawing-rooms. But of course! I insist.”

He switched on a huge, tinkling crystal chandelier.

“No dead bodies? Nobody hurt? Have you had a good look? You wouldn’t like to go down to the cellars? By the way, it’s now a quarter past three.”

He opened the door into the office, and there was Justin Minard sitting on a chair, with Louis standing in the corner as if guarding his prisoner.

“Is this the young man who’s full of stories about shots being fired? I’m delighted to have seen his interesting face. Now, Monsieur Maigret, I suppose I’m entitled to lodge a complaint after being falsely accused and having had my house violated in this way.”

“You’re certainly entitled to do so.”

“I wish you good night then. Louis, show these gentlemen to the door.”

The elder Gendreau opened his mouth, but said nothing. As for Maigret he managed to utter the words :

“Thank you very much.”

Louis marched behind them and shut the heavy gate after them.

They were quite alone, baffled, a little anxious, standing on the left-hand pavement in the Rue Chaptal, and Maigret turned round automatically towards the patch of oil on the wooden paving, as if clinging, in spite of everything, to something tangible. “You know, I promise you I’ve not been drinking.”

“I believe you.”

“And I’m not mad.”

“Of course not.”

“Do you think you’ll get into trouble about this? I heard something about...”

That night Maigret was christening his first frock-coat, and it had been a little tight under the arms.

Chapter II

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At ten to nine, Madame Maigret, fresh and smiling, smelling of toilet soap, opened the bedroom curtains, letting in the bright sunlight. She had not been married very long and she was still not used to seeing a man asleep, the tips of his reddish moustache quivering, his forehead creasing when a fly landed on it, his thick hair all over the place. She laughed. She always laughed when she came to him in the mornings, a cup of coffee in her hand, and when he looked at her, his eyes vague and a little childlike.

She was a big, fresh-looking girl, the kind of girl you only see in pâtisseries or behind the marble counter of a dairy, a big girl, full of vitality, yet nevertheless he could leave her on her own in the little flat in the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir for days on end without her becoming bored for a moment.

“What are you thinking about, Jules?”

She used not to call him Maigret in those days, but she already felt that he deserved a kind of respect, the same respect she must once have accorded her father, the same she would feel for her son if she had one.

“I’m thinking...”

And he recited her a text which had come into his head as soon as he had opened his eyes, after only two hours’ sleep. They were sentences from the police handbook.

It is a hard and fast rule in the Sûreté that officials and members of the force should devote all their time to the service. Since every investigation, once begun, should in principle be carried through without a break, they must not expect any time off duty at any specified hour or even on any day.

He had left the station at six o’clock that morning, when Albert Luce, the assistant secretary, arrived to start work. Outside, the air had been so brisk, the Paris streets had such a wonderful atmosphere that he had walked home and had been

tempted to go a long way round, by Les Halles, to enjoy the smell of the spring fruits and vegetables in the market.

For the last few days, several hundred, several thousand people in Paris had not been sleeping any more than he had. The foreign monarch's visit was to last scarcely three days, but the police squads were sick and tired of it; some of them, such as those dealing with lodging-houses, railway stations, aliens, or traffic duties, had been involved in it for several weeks.

Men had been seconded from various branches and from the local stations as well. The king's movements, which had been carefully timed in advance, at no point touched the Saint-Georges District, and all the men who could be spared had been sent to the Opéra Police Station.

The anarchists were not the only ones to keep the police from their beds. There were the madmen who were invariably sent into a kind of frenzy by this sort of celebration; there were the pickpockets, the thieving prostitutes who were having the time of their lives with the provincials who had come up to see the processions.

"Is it Balthazar coffee?" he asked.

"Why do you ask me that? Isn't it nice?"

"I just want to know why you chose this coffee rather than any other sort. Because it's better?"

"Well, it's no worse, and there are the picture cards."

He had forgotten about the album in which she carefully pasted the cards she found in the packets of coffee, pictures of flowers of every kind.

"When I've got three complete sets, I can get a walnut bedroom suite."

He took a hip bath, as they still had no bathroom in the flat. He had some soup, as he used to do every morning at home in the country.

"I don't suppose you know what time you'll be back?"

And he repeated, smiling:

“... they must not expect any time off duty at any specified hour or even on any day...”

She knew it by heart. She had her hat on already. She liked to walk with him as far as the office, just as she would have taken a child to school, but she never went all the way as he would have been embarrassed if they'd met one of his colleagues.

At ten o'clock on the dot, the superintendent's gig would stop in the Rue La Rochefoucauld, the horse pawing the ground while the coachman took over the reins from his master. Maxime Le Bret was probably the only superintendent in Paris to keep a carriage and live on the Plaine Monceau, in one of the new houses in the Boulevard de Courcelles.

By the time he arrived at the police station at last, he would already have been to the Hoche Club for some fencing, a swim in the pool and a massage.

Maigret's report was on his desk, and Maigret was unduly anxious about it, since it was his first important report. He had worked on it until daybreak, paying attention to the slightest detail, trying hard not to forget any of the theories which were still fresh in his mind.

Justin Minard, the flautist, had returned from the Rue Chaptal with him. They had both stopped outside the door.

“Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“Don't you think your wife will be worrying?”

“It's of no importance.”

And Justin had come in with him. Maigret had taken down his statement which the musician had signed. He still didn't go.

“Won't your wife make a fuss?”

He had said again, gently, but firmly:

“It's of no importance.”

Why should Maigret be thinking of that now? He had almost had to throw him out into the early morning daylight. Yet the flautist had still asked him in a half-timid half-assured voice:

“May I come and see you?”

He had brought a complaint against the aforesaid Louis. He was sticking to it. All these documents were carefully arranged on the superintendent’s desk, on top of the less important daily reports.

They hardly ever saw Maxime Le Bret come in because he went along the corridor and straight into his office, but they could hear him, and this morning Maigret felt his heart give a little jump.

There was a collection of the usual customers on the bench, poor people mostly, in ragged clothes, and he called them in turn, wrote out certificates of domicile or hardship, took details of articles that had been lost or found, consigned the beggars and unlicensed hawkers picked up in the streets to the lock-up.

Just below the clock in the black frame, there was an electric bell, and when this bell rang...

He had calculated that it would take about ten minutes for his report and Minard’s statement to be read. Twenty minutes went by, and he still had not been summoned, but a slight click indicated that his chief was making a telephone call.

A baize door separated Le Bret’s office from the main room of the police station. Through it, one could just make out a vague murmur of voices.

Was Le Bret already in touch with Richard Gendreau, to whose house he often went to dine?

No ring on the bell, but the door was half-opened.

“Maigret!”

A good sign or a bad sign?”

“Come in, my boy.”

Before sitting down at his desk, the superintendent strolled round the room several times, smoking a cigarette. At last he placed his hand on the file, seemed to search for the right words, sighed:

“I’ve read your stuff.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You did what you thought was your duty. Your report is very clear, very detailed.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Even my own name is mentioned.”

He silenced Maigret with a gesture when he opened his mouth to say something.

“I’m not reproaching you. On the contrary.”

“I endeavoured to transcribe faithfully every word that was said.”

“So you had plenty of opportunity to see over the house?”

“They took me into one room after another.”

“You were able to see for yourself that there was nothing amiss.”

“In the room pointed out by Justin Minard, the net curtain was caught in the window as if it had been shut in a hurry.”

“That may have happened at any time, mayn’t it? What proof is there that the curtain hadn’t been like that for a number of days?”

“The father, Monsieur Félicien Gendreau-Balthazar, seemed very upset when he found me in the house.”

“You wrote *frightened*.”

“That’s the impression I got.”

“I know Gendreau personally; I meet him several times a week at my club.”

“I know, Superintendent.”

The superintendent was a handsome man, aristocratic-looking, always to be seen at the best social gatherings, for he had married one of the rich heiresses of Paris. It was probably for that reason that in spite of his way of life he insisted on having a regular job. He had deeply marked crows'-feet and fine wrinkles on his eyelids, and doubtless the night before, like most other nights, he had slept little longer than Maigret.

"Go and get Besson."

He was an inspector, the only one to have been kept at the station during the royal visit.

"I've got a little job for you, Besson, old chap."

He copied onto a loose sheet of paper the name and address of Justin Minard, the flautist.

"You're to make some discreet inquiries about this gentleman for me. And the sooner the better."

Besson looked at the address, cheered up on seeing that it was in Paris, and promised:

"I'll start now, sir."

And when the superintendent was once more alone with Maigret, he gave a very slight smile and said:

"There we are. I think that's all to be done for the moment."

Sitting at his black desk, Maigret spent the angriest hours of his life examining filthy documents, listening to complaints from concierges or explanations from lorry-drivers.

Extreme remedies came into his head, such as immediately handing in his resignation.

So, according to the superintendent, the only thing to be done was to start inquiries about the flautist! Why not have him arrested and put him through a third degree?

Maigret might also have telephoned through to the big chief, or gone to see him. For he knew Xavier Guichard personally. The Chief of the Sûreté had often spent his holidays near his family home in the Allier, and at one time had been a friend of his father's.

Strictly speaking, he was not his protector, but he watched his progress from afar, or rather from above, and no doubt it was he who, for the past four years, had sent Maigret continually from one branch to the other in order to give him experience as quickly as possible of all parts of the workings of the police,

“Minard is not insane. He was not drunk. He did see a window opened. He heard a shot fired. And I saw the patches of oil in the street myself, as clear as daylight.”

That gave him an idea and he left the room, went down three steps and entered the duty room, where some policemen in uniform were playing cards.

“Tell me, Sergeant, have all the men on duty last night handed in their reports yet?”

“Not all of them.”

“I’d like you to ask them something. I want to know if any of them saw a De Dion Bouton in the neighbourhood, between midnight and two o’clock. The driver was wearing a goatskin jacket and goggles. I don’t know if anyone was in the back seat.”

Just too bad for the superintendent! *Every investigation or surveillance, once begun ...*

He knew his theory. In normal circumstances it would be his case, Balthazar or no.

Towards midday he suddenly felt sleepy, but it was not yet his turn to go to lunch. His eyelids were pricking. Occasionally he asked one of the clients the same question twice.

Besson returned, a whiff of absinthe around his moustache, making one think of the coolness of a bistro, or the filtered light on a café terrace on the boulevards.

“Is the chief still in there?”

He had left, so Besson sat down to write his report.

“Poor bloke,” he sighed.

“Who?”

“The musician.”

And Besson, bursting with good health, with a firm and blooming complexion, went on:

“In the first place, he’s got consumption, and that’s no joke for anyone. They’ve been trying to get him away to the mountains for two years, but he won’t hear of it.”

Some horses went past, by the Place Saint-Georges. There had been a parade at the Invalides that morning, and the troops from the various barracks were on their way back to their quarters. The town was still in high spirits, with flags, uniforms, bands marching past, people all decked out for a big official luncheon, hurrying towards the Elysée.

“They live in a two-room flat looking onto a yard, on the fifth floor, and there’s no lift.”

“Did you go up and see them?”

“I had a chat with the boilerman, who lives in the building, then with the concierge, who comes from my part of the country. She gets complaints from the other tenants every month because he plays the flute all day, with the window wide open. The concierge is very fond of him. So is the boilerman, although he owes him for two or three months’ coal. As for his missis...”

“Did you see her?”

“She went past while I was in the lodge. Very dark, firm skin and flashing eyes. A sort of Carmen. Always in her dressing-gown and down at heel, wandering round the shops nearby. She goes to fortune tellers. She’s always at him. The concierge even maintains that she beats him. Poor bloke...!”

Besson laboriously wrote down a few sentences; making out reports was not his strong point.

“I took the métro and went to see his boss at the Brasserie Clichy. Nothing to say. He doesn’t drink. He always gets there five minutes early. He’s pleasant to everybody, and the cashier adores him.”

“Where was he this morning?”

“I don’t know. Not at home. The concierge would have told me.”

Maigret left the office to go and eat a couple of hard-boiled eggs and drink a glass of beer in a little bar in the Place Saint-Georges. When he got back the sergeant had left a note on his desk.

Police-Constable Jullian noticed a vehicle, a De Dion Bouton, at 1.30 a.m., parked in the Rue Mansart outside No. 28. There was no occupant apart from the driver, whose description corresponds to the one given. The vehicle remained in the Rue Mansart for about ten minutes and then drove off in the direction of the Rue Blanche.

The bell under the clock rang, and Maigret got up quickly and opened the baize door. The superintendent had already returned and Maigret could see the pages of his report spread out on the desk, with red pencil markings on them.

“Come in, my boy. Sit down.”

That was quite a rare favour, as the superintendent was usually content to leave his assistants standing.

“I suppose you’ve spent the morning cursing me?”

He was also wearing a frock-coat, but his frock-coat came from the best tailor in the Place Vendôme and his waistcoats were always of the most delicate shade.

“I have re-read your report carefully. A very good report, by the way, as I think I’ve already said. I’ve also had a chat with Besson on the subject of your friend the flautist.”

Maigret took the plunge.

“Have the Gendreau-Balthazars telephoned?”

“They have, but not in the manner you imagine. Richard Gendreau was perfect! Even if he did laugh a little at you and your zeal! Were you expecting recriminations from him? It was just the opposite. I don’t suppose you’re surprised to hear that he found you young and full of spirit. That’s precisely

why he took such a perverse pleasure in opening all the doors to you.”

Maigret looked sullen and his chief was watching him with a slight smile, the smile which was almost the distinctive sign of all the ‘blasé’ people in his set, of all the ‘bons viveurs’, which was the phrase then in vogue.

“Now, tell me, dear boy, if you were in my place, what would you have done this morning?”

And when Maigret did not answer, he went on:

“Asked for a search warrant? On what grounds, for a start? Has a complaint been lodged? Not against the Gendreaus, at all events. Has a crime been committed? Not at all. Is there a body, anyone hurt? Not that we know of. And you went over the house last night, saw every nook and cranny, all the members of the household, some of them very scantily clad.

“Please understand me. I know exactly what has been going on in your head since this morning. I’m a friend of the Gendreaus’. I often visit their house. I even belong to the same club as they do. You’ve been cursing me, haven’t you?”

“There’s the statement and the complaint made by Minard.”

“I’m coming to the flautist. At about half-past one in the morning, he practically tried to force his way into a private house on the pretext that he heard someone call for help.”

“He saw...”

“Don’t forget he is the only person to have seen anything, that none of the neighbours was disturbed. Put yourself in the butler’s place, woken up by someone kicking at the gate.”

“Excuse me. The man Louis was fully dressed, with his tie on, at half past one in the morning, and when Minard rang the bell, most of the lights in the house were out.”

“All right. Don’t forget it’s still your flautist who maintains that the butler was fully dressed. But let’s admit that. Is that a crime? Minard got himself thrown rather roughly into the street. But how would you act if some maniac broke into your

house in the middle of the night on the excuse that you were murdering your wife?"

He proffered his gold cigarette case to Maigret, who had to remind him, perhaps for the hundredth time, that he did not smoke cigarettes. It was a quirk with Le Bret, a condescending, aristocratic gesture. "Now let's look at the matter from a strictly administrative point of view. You've made out your report, and it has to go through the usual channels, which means that it will be sent to the prefect of police, who will judge whether he should send it to the public prosecutor. The flautist's complaint against the butler will have to go through the mill as well."

Maigret was watching him fixedly, an angry look in his eyes, and again he thought of his resignation. He guessed what would follow.

"The Gendreau-Balthazar family is one of the best known in Paris. Any small blackmailing newspaper would be only too happy to grab the chance if the slightest indiscretion was committed."

Maigret said dryly:

"I see."

"And you loathe me, don't you? You think I'm protecting those people because they are powerful or because they're my friends."

Maigret made a move as if to pick the documents from the desk and tear them up, as was expected of him. He would then return to the main office and, in a handwriting as firm as possible, would write out his letter of resignation.

"Now, young Maigret, my lad, I've some news for you."

This was odd: his mockery was becoming affectionate.

"This morning while I was reading your report, and later while I was talking to you, there was something that irked me. Like something one can't quite remember. I don't know whether that happens to you too. The more you try to pin it down, the more it escapes you. Nevertheless I knew it was important, that it might even alter the whole matter. I found

out what it was at last, just as I was going to luncheon. Contrary to habit, I was lunching at home, because there were guests. When I saw my wife, I discovered one of the missing links. What was irking me this morning was something she had told me. But what? Suddenly, right in the middle of the meal, it came back to me. Yesterday, before leaving the Boulevard de Courcelles, I asked, as I often do:

“ ‘What are you doing this afternoon?’

“Now my wife replied:

“ ‘I’m having tea with Lise and Bernadette in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré.’

“Bernadette is the Comtesse d’Estireau. As for Lise, she is Lise Gendreau-Balthazar.”

He stopped talking and looked at Maigret, a twinkle in his eyes.

“There you are, my friend. All I had to find out was whether Lise Gendreau did in fact have tea with my wife yesterday, at five o’clock, in the Pihan Tearooms. My wife confirms that she did. Not once did she mention going to Anseval. Back here, I re-read your report carefully.”

Maigret’s face had lit up, and he was already opening his mouth to say something, triumphantly.

“Just a moment. Don’t go too fast. Last night you found the same Lise Gendreau’s bedroom unoccupied. Her brother told you she was in the Nièvre.”

“Then...”

“It doesn’t prove a thing. Richard Gendreau was not giving evidence under oath. You had no warrant, no official right to interrogate him.”

“But now...”

“No more have you now. That’s why I’m advising you...”

Maigret had ceased to follow. His hopes had been raised and then dashed, and he no longer knew what attitude to take. He was hot. He was humiliated at being treated like a child.

“Have you made your holiday plans yet?”

He almost made a tactless reply.

“I know public servants usually fix their days off and their leaves a long time in advance. However, if you wish, you could take your holidays as from now, from today. I even think that might ease my conscience. Particularly if you intended to stay in Paris. A policeman on holiday is no longer a member of the police force, and there are steps he can allow himself to take which would otherwise be difficult to sanction officially.”

Hope again. But he was still afraid. He was expecting a new reversal.

“Of course, I trust I shall receive no complaints about you. If you should wish to communicate with me, or require some information, you can call me at the Boulevard de Courcelles. You’ll find my number in the book.”

Maigret opened his mouth once again, this time to thank him, but the superintendent was gently urging him in the direction of the door; he seemed suddenly to remember an unimportant detail, and added:

“By the way, for the past six or seven years Félicien Gendreau has been subject to a board of guardians, just as if he were an irresponsible youth. Richard’s the one who has been in effective control of the business since the death of his mother. Is your wife well? Is she getting used to life in Paris and her new flat?”

After a dry hand had shaken his, Maigret was back on the other side of the baize door. He was still bewildered and he walked mechanically to his black desk, when he noticed one of the figures seated on the bench, the other side of what he called the ‘counter’.

It was Justin the flautist, dressed in black, but not in evening dress this time, without his oilskin mackintosh, Justin Minard, quietly waiting between a tramp and a fat woman in a green shawl, who was giving her baby the breast.

The musician winked at him, as if to ask permission to come up to the railing. Maigret gave him an understanding nod

in return, put his papers in order, and told one of his colleagues the details of matters in hand.

“Going on leave!” he announced.

“Leave in April, with a foreign king on our hands?”

“Leave.”

And the other one, who knew Maigret had not been married long:

“Baby?”

“No baby.”

“Sick?”

“Not sick.”

That made it more disturbing, and his colleague shook his head.

“Ah well! It’s your own affair. Have a nice holiday anyway. Some people have all the luck.”

Maigret took his hat, put on his cuffs—he always took them off when he got to the office—went through the barrier which separated the public from the police. Justin Minard got up, quite naturally, and quite naturally fell into step with him, without saying a word.

Had his wife given him a thrashing, as Besson led one to suppose? There he was, very fair, very frail with pink cheeks and blue eyes, and he was attaching himself to Maigret as a stray dog might attach itself to a passer-by.

There was bright sunshine outside, flags at all the windows. The air seemed to be vibrant with drums and trumpets. The people were walking along gaily, most of the men walked with a military spring in their step, which they had caught from watching the march-pasts.

When Minard drew level with Maigret, on the pavement, on his left, he asked in an anxious voice:

“Have you been sacked?”

He obviously imagined that a public servant could be sacked as easily as a flautist in a band and he was miserable to think he was the virtual cause of it.

“No, I’ve not been sacked. I’m on holiday.”

“Oh!”

It was a worried ‘Oh!’ There was concern in it, already almost a reproach.

“They prefer you to be away at the moment, is that it? I suppose they’re going to drop the whole thing? What about my complaint?”

His voice was growing harder.

“At least they can’t make my complaint vanish into thin air, can they. I’d like to tell you right away that I wouldn’t let them do it to me.”

“The complaint is going through the usual channels.”

“That’s just as well! Particularly as I’ve got news for you. One piece of news, at any rate...”

They had reached the Place Saint-Georges, quiet and provincial, with its little bistro smelling of white wine. Maigret, quite naturally, pushed open the door. That afternoon there was certainly a feeling of holidays in the air. The tin bar-counter had been newly polished, the green-tinged reflections of the glasses of Vouvray made one thirsty.

“You saw two maids in the house, didn’t you? Isn’t that what you told me?”

“Germaine and Marie,” Maigret recited. “Not counting Madame Louis, the cook.”

“Well, there was only one!”

A child-like joy showed in the musician’s eyes, and he looked more than ever like a faithful dog who had fetched a piece of wood for his master.

“I had a chat with the woman from the dairy the Gendreaus use, just next to the tobacconist’s on the corner.”

Maigret looked at him, surprised, a little put out, and he could not help thinking of the Carmen woman and her bullying.

“Since Saturday, Germaine, the older maid, has been in the Oise where her sister is expecting a baby. I’m free during the day, you see.”

“But what about your wife?”

“It’s of no importance,” he repeated, in rather a detached voice. “I said to myself, that if you were going on with the case, I could probably give you a hand here and there. People are usually nice to me, I don’t know why.”

And Maigret thought: “Except Carmen!”

“My round this time. Oh yes! Just because I only ever drink strawberry cordial, there’s no reason why I shouldn’t pay a round. You were only kidding about holidays, weren’t you?”

Was it betraying professional secrets to give him a wink?

“I must say I should have been disappointed in you if you hadn’t been. I don’t know those people. I’ve nothing against them personally. Even though their Louis has got the face of a murderer and they’ve been telling lies.”

A young girl, dressed in red, was selling mimosa which had just arrived from Nice, and Maigret bought a sprig of it for his wife who did not know the Côte d’Azur except from a coloured postcard of the Baie des Anges.

“Just tell me what I’ve got to do. And above all don’t be afraid I’ll be a nuisance to you! I’m quite used to keeping my mouth shut!”

He looked at him beseechingly. He would have liked to offer Maigret another Vouvray to help him decide, but he didn’t dare.

“In those families there’s always a lot of dirty linen hidden away; but it can’t be hidden from everybody. Servants usually chatter too much and the tradespeople know a good deal.”

Automatically, without realizing that, in a way, he was sealing his alliance with the flautist, Maigret murmured:

“Mademoiselle Gendreau is not at Anseval, as her brother made out.”

“Where is she then?”

“Since Germaine, the chambermaid, wasn’t in the house, it was probably Lise Gendreau I saw in her nightdress, in the maid’s room.”

That embarrassed him. He had grown up in the shadow of a château, where his father had been a bailiff. In spite of himself he had acquired a respect for the rich and the great. And the oddest thing was that the flautist shared his embarrassment, didn’t say anything for a while, staring at his strawberry cordial.

“You really think so?” he asked at last, worried.

“At any rate there was a woman wearing a nightdress in the maid’s room. A fat girl, with a stale smell about her.”

And that embarrassed him as well, as if upper-class young ladies who bore a name that was spelt out in big letters in the métro subways should not have smelt stale, like any country girl.

The two men were day-dreaming vaguely in front of their drinks, with the smell of mimosa, white wine and strawberry cordial about them, the sun shining on their backs, and Maigret gave a start when his companion’s voice called him back to reality, saying quite ingenuously:

“What are we going to do?”

Chapter III

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It is to be recommended that all Police Officers shall have in their possession one evening dress-suit, a dinner jacket and a morning coat, without which it is quite impossible to appear at certain social gatherings.

This came among the instructions which were as fresh in his memory as a first communicant’s catechism. But the instructions must have been drawn up in far too optimistic a

spirit, or else the word ‘certain’ had to be given a very restricted meaning.

He had tried on his dress clothes the previous evening with the idea of making an entry into the sort of places frequented by the Gendreaus, the Hoche Club, for example, or the Haussmann Club, and a casual comment of his wife’s had been enough to bring him back to his right senses.

“How smart you are, Jules!” she had exclaimed as he was looking at himself in the wardrobe mirror.

She would never have permitted herself to be sarcastic. She was certainly being sincere. Still, there was something indefinable in her tone, in her smile, which warned him not to try passing himself off as a young toff.

A torchlight retreat in the Place de la Bastille was being sounded. Both of them were leaning out over the window sill and as the coolness of the night surrounded them Maigret found it harder not to let his optimism sink.

“You realize that if I succeed, I am almost certain to get straight into the Quai des Orfèvres. Once I’m there...”

What further ambition could he have? Join the Sûreté, or perhaps the famous Chief’s Squad, as the homicide squad was then called!

For that, all he needed to do was to succeed in his case, which meant, without attracting attention, to unveil the inmost secrets of a wealthy residence in the Rue Chaptal.

He had had a restless night, and on waking up, at six in the morning, there was a further reason to think rather ironically about his police manual.

A cap, a scarf, and an old coat have been proved by experience to constitute a very effective disguise.

This time while he was examining himself in the mirror, Madame Maigret hadn’t laughed. She had said, a little sadly.

“Next month you’ll have to buy yourself a new suit.”

It was a delicate point. It implied that his old coat did not look much more worn than the one they called his best. In

other words he need not have bothered to disguise himself.

That was why he finally decided to put on a collar and tie, and wear his bowler hat as well.

The weather was still superb, as if specially ordered for the king who would shortly be escorted to Versailles. Some two hundred thousand Parisians were already on their way to the royal town, where, by evening, the parks would be littered with waste paper and empty bottles.

Justin Minard, on the other hand, must have been catching his train to Conflans, where he was going to try and meet the famous Germaine, the Gendreaus' chambermaid.

"If I can only track her down," he had said, in his gentle, disarming way, "I'm sure she'll tell me all she knows. I don't know how it happens, but people always feel they have to tell me their life stories."

It was seven o'clock when Maigret took possession, as it were, of the Rue Chaptal, and he congratulated himself on not having put on his cap and scarf, because the first person he met was a policeman from his own station, who greeted him by name.

There are some streets where it is easier to 'keep a look-out', thanks to the bustle, the shops, cafés, but the Rue Chaptal is not one of those, being short and wide, without any business premises and practically speaking no traffic.

All the curtains in the Gendreau-Balthazar house were drawn, and the same was true of most of the windows in the street. Maigret stood, first at one corner, then at another, feeling rather ill at ease, and when the first maid appeared from one of the houses to fetch the milk from the Rue Fontaine, next door to the tobacconist's, he had the impression that she looked at him suspiciously and quickened her step.

It was the worst hour of the day. Despite the sun, the air was still chilly, and he had not put on an overcoat, since it would get warm later on. The pavements were completely deserted. The tobacconist's on the corner didn't open until half past

seven, and Maigret drank an unpleasant cup of coffee there which upset his stomach.

Another maid with her milk can, then a third. They looked as if they had just climbed out of bed and had not yet washed. Then shutters began opening here and there, women with their hair in curling papers looked down into the street and invariably gave him suspicious looks. But there was no sign of life at the Gendreau's; until at a quarter past eight a chauffeur in a very tight-fitting black uniform appeared from the Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and rang the bell at the gate.

Fortunately the Vieux Calvados had just opened. It was the only place in the street where he could take refuge, at the corner of the Rue Henner, not quite opposite the Gendreaus'. Maigret just had time to step inside the door.

Louis, in a striped waistcoat, opened the main gate, then exchanged a few words with the chauffeur. The gate remained open and was not shut again all day. At the far end of the covered way a sunny courtyard could be seen, some greenery, a garage, and the sound of hooves suggested that there were also stables.

"Something to eat?"

A very fat red-faced man, with tiny eyes, was quietly watching Maigret, who started in surprise.

"What would you say to a few slices of sausage, with a bowl of cider? There's nothing better for you first thing in the morning."

And so the day began, a day like many Maigret was to spend during the course of his career, but one which had a dream-like effect on him then.

To start with, the surroundings were very odd. In that street of big houses and blocks of flats, the Vieux Calvados seemed like a country inn that had been forgotten when Paris had grown up around it. It was a low, narrow building. There was one step down into a rather long, very cool room, where reflections gleamed here and there on the tin-covered counter, and the bottles appeared to have been set in place for ages.

The smell was unique, too. That was probably due to the trap-door which was open in the floor and communicated with the cellar.

A kind of breath rose up from it, acid, cider and calvados, old casks, must, at the same time as other odours coming from the kitchen. At the other end of the room, a spiral staircase led upstairs, and the whole seemed like a stage-setting; the landlord, short-legged, vast, stubborn-browed, with sparkling little eyes, came on and went off like an actor.

Could Maigret have done otherwise than accept what was served him? He had never drunk cider for his breakfast before. It was his first experience, and contrary to his expectations his chest was flooded with warmth.

“I’m waiting for someone,” he felt obliged to declare.

“It’s no concern of mine!”

Except that the shrug of his shoulders meant: “That’s not true.”

There was something sceptical in his glance, so sceptical indeed that before long Maigret was feeling uneasy.

The landlord was eating, too, off the counter, thick slices of sausage, and within a quarter of an hour he had emptied the jug of cider he had gone to draw from the barrel, in the cellar.

At the Gendreaus’ the chauffeur could now and then be seen in the courtyard with his coat off, busy hosing down the motor-car, of which only the front wheels were visible. But it was not a De Dion Bouton. It was a black limousine, with big copper headlamps.

There were still very few people in the street, the odd clerk making his way towards the métro, some maids or housekeepers hurrying off to the shops in the Rue Fontaine.

No one came into the Vieux Calvados, where a vast woman had appeared, feet first, shod in red slippers, down the spiral staircase, and gone into the kitchen without a word.

Members of the force on surveillance duty are no longer their own masters; their actions are in effect determined by the

slightest movements of the individual under surveillance.

Some curtains were drawn open on the first floor, and they were those in Richard Gendreau's bedroom. The time was nine o'clock. The landlord of the Vieux Calvados was heaving himself slowly about the room, a duster in his hand, and he seemed to be deliberately avoiding making conversation.

"It looks as though I'm to be kept waiting," said Maigret, who felt he had to justify himself.

It wasn't a bar, but a restaurant with its regular customers. There were table cloths on the tables with a small red check pattern like that of the curtains. Smells of cooking were already coming in through the door at the back, and they could hear the peeled potatoes falling into a bucket, one by one.

Why were the landlord and his wife not talking to each other? Since the wife had come downstairs, both of them seemed—all three, to be more exact—to be performing an odd sort of pantomime.

The landlord wiped his glasses, his bottles, polished the tin surface of the bar, paused for a moment before several earthenware jugs and eventually chose one of them. Then, on his own initiative, he filled two glasses, pointed to the clock hanging on one of the walls, next to an advertising calendar, and said simply:

"Time to start."

His little eyes watched for Maigret's reaction on first tasting the calvados; he clicked his tongue, took out his duster again, which was kept hitched in his braces when not in use.

At half past nine, the chauffeur across the street put on his coat, and they heard the explosions of the engine starting. The car moved into position under the covered way; a few minutes later, Richard Gendreau in a grey suit, with a carnation in his button-hole, took his seat in it.

Was the *patron* of the restaurant simply an unkind fool? Or had he, on the contrary, already guessed everything? He looked at the car as it went past, then at Maigret, heaved a slight sigh and went on with his work.

Now that it was half past nine he went behind the bar again, chose another jug, filled two small glasses, without saying a word, and pushed one of them towards his customer.

Maigret was not to realize until later in the day, that this was a ritual, or a kind of craze. As each half-hour passed, there was the little glass of calvados, which explained the old fellow's blotched complexion and the wateriness in which his eyes were soon swimming.

"Thank you very much, but..."

No use! It was impossible to refuse. There was such an air of authority in the look he was given that he preferred to swallow his glass of spirits, although it was beginning to make him feel unwell.

At ten o'clock, he asked:

"Have you got a telephone?"

"On the first landing, opposite the lavatories."

Maigret set off up the spiral staircase and found a small room where there were only four tables with check tablecloths on them. It was low-ceilinged. The windows reached to the floor.

Balthazar Coffee: Avenue de l'Opéra... Warehouse: Quai de Valmy... Managing Offices: Rue Auber...

He rang the Rue Auber number.

"I'd like to speak to Monsieur Richard Gendreau."

"Who's speaking?"

"Tell him it's Louis."

Almost immediately he recognized Gendreau's voice at the other end of the line.

"Hallo! Louis?"

He sounded worried. Maigret hung up. Through the window he could see the butler in his striped waistcoat, who had just come out to stand on the pavement, peacefully smoking a

cigarette. He did not stay there long. He must have heard the telephone ring.

His employer, disturbed, was calling him up.

Good! So Richard Gendreau was at his office, where he probably spent a fair part of each day. Louis did not return, but the main gate had still not been closed.

A very young face appeared at a second-floor window, where the curtains had just been drawn apart. It was Marie, the little maid, with a pointed nose, her neck like a plucked bird's, her hair fluffed up, and a pretty lace bonnet placed on top of it. She was dressed in black and was wearing a serving maid's apron such as Maigret had only ever seen on the stage.

He was afraid to stay too long on the first floor and thus rouse the landlord's suspicions. He came down just in time for the glass of calvados which was served to him with the same authoritative air as the earlier ones. With the glass, a saucer was pushed towards him with some slices of sausage on it, and the old fellow announced:

"I come from Pontfarcy!"

He pronounced this name with such a sense of importance that it must have held some mysterious meaning. Did that explain the sausage? Was it a practice of the people of Pontfarcy to consume a glass of calvados every half hour? He added:

"Not far from Vire!"

"Do you mind if I use your telephone again?"

It was not yet half past ten, and already his surroundings were becoming familiar. He was beginning to feel at ease, and even fairly light-hearted. It was amusing, this window which reached from the floor to the ceiling and gave a clear view, from the street below, of people who dined there.

"Hallo! Have I got Monsieur Gendreau-Balthazar's house?"

This time it was the sinister Louis who answered.

"Could I speak to Mademoiselle Gendreau, please?"

“Mademoiselle is not at home. Who is that speaking?”

As before, he hung up and returned to the room on the ground floor, where the landlord, more serious than ever, was transcribing the day's menu on to a slate, pondering over each word.

There were lots of windows open by now, and carpets being beaten above the empty street. An old lady in black, with a mauve veil, was walking a little dog, which stopped at every doorstep to raise a leg, but did nothing.

“I'm wondering,” Maigret remarked with a forced laugh, “whether my friend has forgotten our appointment.”

Did the fellow believe him? Had he guessed that Maigret was from the police?

At eleven, in the Gendreaus' yard, a coachman harnessed a bay horse to a brougham. Now this coachman had not entered the house by the main gate. It was unlikely that he slept in the house, which meant that there was another way in and out.

At a quarter past eleven, Félicien Gendreau, the father, emerged, in morning coat, yellow gloves, fawn top hat, a cane in his hand, his moustache well-waxed, and the coachman assisted him up into the carriage which set off towards the Rue Blanche. No doubt the old gentleman was going for a ride in the Bois and would then lunch at his club?

...it is to be recommended that all police officers should have in their possession one evening dress-suit, a dinner jacket and a morning coat...

And Maigret, as he glanced in the mirror, through the bottles, gave a wry smile. And yellow gloves, no doubt? And a gold-headed cane! And pale spats to go over patent-leather shoes!

It was just his luck, for his first case! He might have had to penetrate into any section of society, *petits bourgeois*, shopkeepers, rag and bone merchants, tramps. He felt that would have been easy. But this town house, with its main gate which impressed him more than a church door, its marble-columned porch, even its courtyard where they polished a limousine for

one of the masters, before harnessing a pedigree horse for the other!

Calvados! There was no way out. He would hold his own to the very end. He would stay put at the Vieux Calvados as long as was necessary.

He had seen no sign of Madame Louis. Probably she didn't go shopping every morning and kept supplies in the house. Certainly the gentlemen there looked as though they would be lunching out.

Justin Minard was lucky. He was now in the country. He was dealing with Germaine Baboeuf—the dairy-woman had revealed her name—who was at her sister's, probably in a nice little cottage with a garden and a few chickens.

“Do you think your wife...?”

“It's of no importance.”

And Madame Maigret, who today had decided to spring-clean the flat!

“You think it's worth it?” he had said to her. “We'll only be here for such a short time! We'll be sure to find somewhere to live in a nicer district.”

He never suspected that, thirty years later, they would still be living under the same roof in the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, having taken over the next-door flat as well.

By half past eleven, at last, there were some customers in the Vieux Calvados, house-painters in white smocks, who were old friends of the place, for one of them greeted the landlord with a friendly:

“ 'Morning, Paumelle.”

For them it was apéritifs, which they gulped down as they stood, while they studied the menu on the slate, before sitting down.

By noon, all the tables were occupied, and Madame Paumelle emerged from the kitchen every so often, with plates in her hands, while her husband saw to the drinks going up and down from the cellar to the ground floor, and from the ground

floor to the one above. Most of the customers were labourers from nearby building sites, but there were also a couple of cabmen, whose vehicles stood outside the house.

Maigret would very much have liked to telephone Monsieur Le Bret to ask his advice. He had eaten too much, drunk too much. He was feeling torpid, and if he, instead of the flautist, had been in the Oise, he would probably have treated himself to a siesta in the grass, under a tree, with a newspaper spread over his face.

He was beginning to lose confidence in himself, even in his job, which momentarily seemed futile. Was it really a man's work to hang around all day in a bistro, in order to watch a house where nothing happened? The others who were there had a definite task. Throughout Paris, people were coming and going like ants, but at least they knew where they were going!

Nobody else was obliged, for instance, to drink a glass of calvados every half-hour, with a fellow whose eyes were growing more and more bleary, his smile more and more irritating.

Paumelle was laughing at him, he felt convinced of it. And what could he do in return? Go and plant himself on the pavement, in full sunshine, in sight of countless windows along the street?

It reminded him of an unpleasant memory, a stupid incident which had practically decided him to leave the police force. It was scarcely two years before. He had been put on street duty, and his special job was to catch pickpockets in the métro.

A cap, a scarf and an old coat have been proved by experience...

He had still believed that in those days. Basically, he believed it now. It happened opposite the Samaritaine. He was mounting the steps of the métro. Just in front of him, a fellow in a bowler hat neatly slit the handle of an old lady's reticule. Maigret leapt on him, seized the bag, a black velvet one, tried to hold the man who began shouting:

"Stop thief!"

And it was Maigret whom the crowd attacked with a rain of blows, whilst the gentleman in the bowler hat discreetly made off.

At the moment he was beginning to have doubts about his friend Justin Minard. Perhaps the second floor window was flung open? So what? Anybody's entitled to open his window in the middle of the night. There are people who walk in their sleep, who start crying out...

The Vieux Calvados was emptying once more. The landlord and his wife had not exchanged a single word all morning. They were both going about their business in silence, as if in a well-disciplined ballet. And then at last, at twenty past two, something did happen. A motorcar drove slowly down the street, and it was a grey De Dion Bouton, with the driver wearing a goatskin jacket and goggles, at the steering wheel.

The motor did not pull up outside the Gendreaus' house, but drove slowly past, and Maigret was able to see that there was no one inside. By hurrying over to the window he was able to get the number: *B.780*.

It was not practical to run after the car, which was already turning a corner of the Rue Fontaine. He stood there, his heart beating fast, and less than five minutes later, the same motor-car drove past again, still going very slowly.

When he returned to the bar counter, Paumelle was staring at him hard, though one couldn't have guessed what he was thinking. He simply filled two glasses and pushed one of them across to his customer.

The motor did not reappear. It was now the time when the corps de ballet from the Opéra would be playing nymphs in the gardens of Versailles, with all those gentlemen in their full dress, a hundred thousand people crushed together, children being hoisted on to shoulders, red balloons, and sellers of coconuts and little paper flags.

The Rue Chaptal, however, was going to sleep. Scarcely a cab went by from one hour to the next, with the dull plod of the horses' shoes on the wooden paving-blocks.

At ten minutes to four Louis appeared. He had put on a black jacket over his striped waistcoat and was wearing a black bowler. He first paused for a moment, framed in the arch of the gateway, lit a cigarette and puffed the smoke insolently in front of him; then he walked slowly as far as the corner of the Rue Fontaine, and Maigret saw him go into the tobacconist's.

He soon came out again and made his way back. For a second his eyes rested on the sign of the Vieux Calvados: there was too much light outside and it was too dark indoors for him to have been able to recognize the secretary from the Saint-Georges Police Station.

Was he expecting someone? Was he trying to make up his mind? He walked to the corner of the Rue Blanche, and there it looked as if he caught sight of someone whom Maigret couldn't see; then he swiftly strode out of view.

Maigret almost followed him. He was only prevented from doing so out of a sort of self-respect. He could feel the bleary-eyed stare of the landlord fixed on him. He would have had to invent an explanation, ask how much he owed, hand over the money, and by the time he reached the Rue Blanche, the butler would probably be far away.

Another plan came to mind: quietly pay the bill, take advantage of Louis's absence and go and ring the bell opposite, ask to speak to Mademoiselle Gendreau, or merely to Marie.

He did neither. Even as he was thinking it over, in fact, a cab came down the street from the direction of the Rue Blanche. The cabman in his *cuir bouilli* hat was carefully studying the numbers of the houses and stopped just beyond the Gendreaus'. He didn't climb down from his seat. He appeared to have received his instructions already. His meter flag was lowered.

Two or three minutes at most ticked by. Marie, still in her apron and lace bonnet, poked her mousy little face out under the archway. Then she disappeared, returning with a travelling bag, looked up and down the street and went over to the cab.

Because of the bar window Maigret could not hear what she was saying to the cabby. The latter, without leaving his seat, lifted up the bag which could not have been heavy and placed it beside him.

Marie retraced her steps, with a jaunty walk. She had as slender a waist as Polaire and she was so tiny that her mass of hair seemed to make her top-heavy.

She disappeared, and a moment later a new figure appeared, a woman, a girl, tall, well-built, dressed in a navy suit, a blue hat on her head, a white veil with big embroidered spots on it.

What made Maigret blush? Was it because he had seen her in a nightdress, in the disorder of a maid's bedroom?

She was certainly no maid. This could only be Lise Gendreau who, maintaining her dignity despite her haste, swaying her hips a little, was walking towards the cab, in which she took her seat.

Maigret was so excited that he practically forgot to take the number of the vehicle: 48. He noted it down at once and blushed again under Paumelle's gaze.

"There, you see!" the man sighed as he looked round for a fresh jug to choose.

"See what?"

"You see how things happen in the best families, as they call them."

He looked jubilant, without going so far as to smile.

"That's who you were waiting for, wasn't it?"

He became scornful and shoved a glass in front of Maigret. Frowning, he seemed to be implying: 'If you must keep things to yourself!'

And Maigret, in order to recover lost ground, as if to return to favour, said:

"It was Mademoiselle Gendreau, wasn't it?"

"Balthazar Coffee, yes, sir. And I doubt if we shall be seeing her again in this street, for quite a while."

“You think she’s going on a journey?”

The fellow gave him a crushing look. He was overwhelming his young customer with all the weight of his fifty or sixty years, with all the little glasses he had drunk in the company of all sorts of folk, with his knowledge of all the secrets of the neighbourhood.

“Who are you working for?” he asked, suddenly suspicious.

“But... I’m not working for anyone...”

Just a glance that spoke more clearly than words: “That’s a lie.”

Then, with a shrug of the shoulders:

“Never mind!”

“What were you thinking?”

“Don’t deny that you’ve been prowling around the neighbourhood before now!”

“Me? I promise you...”

It was the truth. He was eager to prove his good faith. And the man was studying him quietly, seemed to hesitate, finally sighed:

“I’d taken you for a friend of the count’s.”

“Count who?”

“Doesn’t matter, since you’re not. You’ve got the same walk, the same way of pulling back your shoulders now and then.”

“You think Mademoiselle Gendreau has gone to meet a count?”

Paumelle didn’t reply, since he was watching Louis, who had just reappeared at the corner of the Rue Fontaine. As he had left by the Rue Blanche, he had been all round the block. He seemed more sprightly than before. He really looked as if he were going for a stroll with no thought in his head but to soak in the sunshine. He glanced down the deserted length of the street, then like someone treating himself to a well-earned

glass of white wine, he stepped into the tobacconist's bar on the corner.

"Does he ever come in here?"

A firm categorical "no".

"He's got a nasty face."

"Lots of people have nasty faces, but they find it hard to change them."

Was he referring to Maigret when he said that? He was going on talking, almost to himself, whilst the sound of washing up came in from the kitchen:

"Just as there are some people who are frank and others who aren't."

Maigret had the feeling that only the slightest obstacle was standing in the way of his making important discoveries, but that obstacle, unfortunately, was his failure to win the confidence of this huge man, soaked in calvados. Was it too late to do so? He had certainly lost it by declaring that he wasn't a friend of the count's. He felt distinctly that the whole morning had been characterized by misunderstanding.

"I belong to a private detective agency," he said, at a venture.

"Well I never."

Hadn't his chief urged him not to involve the official police in this business?

He told the lie in order to get at the truth. He would have given a lot, at that moment, to have been twenty years older, and to have had the weight and build of his companion.

"I suspected something like that would be happening."

"And it has happened, you see!"

"So you think she won't be coming back?"

He must have been continually missing the mark, for Paumelle merely shrugged his shoulders, not without a hint of pity. So he tried a new approach.

“It’s my round,” he declared, pointing to the earthenware jugs.

Was the landlord going to refuse to have a drink with him? Again he shrugged his shoulders, grunted:

“Seeing what time it is, we’d do better to uncork a bottle.”

He went down to the cellar to fetch it. If Maigret was feeling unsteady, after all today’s glasses of calvados, Paumelle still had a firm step, and the unbanistered stairs, more like a ladder than anything else, held no terrors for him.

“Look here, young fellow m’lad: you have to be an old dog to tell lies!”

“You think I’m...”

The man was filling the glasses.

“Who would be employing a private detective agency over this? Not the count, is it? Still less these Gendreau gentlemen, either father or son. As for Monsieur Hubert...”

“Hubert who?”

“You see! You don’t even know the family!”

“Is there another son?”

“How many houses are there in the street?”

“I don’t know. Forty...? Fifty...?”

“You go and count them...! Then go and knock on each door. Perhaps you’ll find somebody who’ll give you information. As far as I’m concerned, I’ll ask you to excuse me. I’m not turning you out into the street. You can stay here as long as you think fit. Only now’s the time for my siesta and that’s sacred.”

There was a straw-bottomed chair behind the bar, and Paumelle sat himself in it, with his back to the shop-front, closed his eyes and instantaneously seemed to sink into sleep.

Doubtless hearing no further sound, his wife put her head round the kitchen door, a cloth in one hand, a plate in the other, and having set her mind at rest, returned to her washing

up without a glance at Maigret, who went back, rather crestfallen, to his seat at the window.

Chapter IV

« ^ »

They had arranged that when Minard returned from Conflans he would leave a note at the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir to let Maigret know what had happened.

“But it’s right out of your way!” Maigret had protested.

He had received the usual reply:

“It’s of no importance.”

Maigret had also asked him a question, timidly, since he was doing his best not to discourage the flautist.

“What’s to be your pretext for going down there? What are you going to say to them?”

It wasn’t until now, looking back on it, after an exhausting day, as Maigret was returning home along the brightly-lit boulevards, that the musician’s reply frightened him a little.

“I’ll think of something. Don’t worry.”

However, after a period of despondency, during the afternoon, due possibly to the overpowering presence of the landlord of the Vieux Calvados, possibly to the difficulty he had had in digesting the small glasses of calvados he had been swallowing since morning, Maigret was feeling more confident.

Something was in fact happening to him which he was not yet aware of and he never suspected that the sudden change which had just occurred would become so common a feature of his life that it would one day become almost a legend at the Quai des Orfèvres.

Till now it was hardly more than a pleasant warmth running through his body, a more definite way of walking, of looking at the people, the shadows, the lights, the cabs and trams around him.

A while ago, in the Rue Chaptal, he had been feeling resentful of the superintendent for having allowed him to

conduct this case and he had almost begun to think that Le Bret was slyly playing a dirty trick on him.

Was it possible for one man single-handed to attack a fortress such as the home of the Balthazars? Is that how the great ones in the chief's squad worked? They had countless aids on which they could rely, files, records, collaborators everywhere, informers. If they felt like having ten men shadowed, they would set ten detectives on their various tracks.

Yet now Maigret was suddenly content to be on his own, to go round snuffing in the corners by himself.

He could not foresee, either, that one day it would be his own method and when he would be, in his turn, chief of the special squad, with a small army of policemen under his command, he would sometimes keep a look-out duty in person, follow a suspect through the streets, wait for hours in a small bar.

Before leaving the Vieux Calvados, where Paumelle had ceased to treat him with anything but supreme indifference, he had used the telephone twice more. To the Urbaine, first, because that was the company whose colours were borne by the cab which Lise Gendreau had taken. He had had to hang on at the telephone for a long time.

"Number 48 comes from the depot at La Villette. The cabby's name is Eugène Cornille. He started work today at noon. There's not much hope of his getting back to the depot before midnight."

"You don't know where I might be able to find him, between now and then?"

"He usually has his cab in the rank at the Place Saint-Augustin, but that obviously depends on his fares. There's a little restaurant round there called "Au Rendezvous du Massif Central". They say he goes there to grab a bite of something whenever he can."

The other telephone call was to the automobile department at the Préfecture. It took even longer to find the number of the

motor in the files. Since Maigret was supposed to be telephoning from the police station, they proposed ringing him back.

“I’d sooner hold the line.”

He was eventually given the name and address: the Marquis de Bazancourt, 3, Avenue Gabriel.

Another wealthy neighbourhood, probably a private house with windows looking onto the Champs-Élysées. He couldn’t risk going and ringing at the door. He stopped in a tobacconist’s shop on the way, to telephone.

“Could I speak to the Marquis de Bazancourt, please?”

A haughty voice answered at the other end:

“Is it personal?”

And when he answered in the affirmative:

“The marquis died three months ago.”

Then he did say something naïve:

“Has nobody taken his place?”

“I beg your pardon? I don’t understand. All his property has been sold, and there’s only the house that hasn’t yet found a buyer.”

“You don’t know who’s bought the De Dion Bouton?”

“A mechanic in the Rue des Acacias, off the Avenue de la Grande Armée. I forget his name, but I don’t think there’s another garage in the street.”

At five o’clock, Maigret reached the Étoile by métro and did find a garage in the street that had been mentioned to him, but it was shut and somebody had written on a sheet of paper:

“All inquiries next door.”

On one side there was a bootmaker’s, on the other a bistro. He would have to make inquiries at the bistro. Unfortunately, the wine-seller knew nothing.

“Dédé hasn’t been in today. He does odd jobs, you know. He sometimes goes on long trips for his clients.”

“You haven’t got his home address?”

“He lives in a boarding house near the Place des Ternes, but I don’t know exactly which one.”

“Is he married?”

Maigret wasn’t sure, since he dared not ask too many questions, but he had the feeling that Dédé was a gentleman of rather a particular type, and if he ever wanted a woman, it would be on the pavement between the Étoile and the Place des Ternes that he would have most chance of meeting her.

He spent the rest of the afternoon looking for Cornille, the cab-driver. He unearthed the Rendezvous du Massif Central.

“He usually comes in here every day for something to eat.”

Unfortunately this hadn’t happened today. The chance of his fares hadn’t once brought Cornille near his Saint-Augustin haven.

Maigret eventually went home, and was walking through the entrance hall when the concierge opened her window in the glass door:

“Monsieur Maigret...! Monsieur Maigret...! I’ve got something important for you...”

It was a note which he was told to read before he reached the flat.

Don’t go up to your flat right away. I must talk to you first. I waited as long as I could. Come and see me at the Brasserie Clichy. The young lady is upstairs with your wife.

*Your devoted friend,
Justin Minard.*

It had suddenly grown dark outside. On the pavement, Maigret looked up, saw the curtains drawn in their flat, imagined the two women in the small dining-room, which was also used as a sitting-room. What could they possibly find to say to each other? He knew Madame Maigret would have laid the table, perhaps even served dinner?

He took the métro, got off at the Place Blanche, went into the vast main room of the brasserie, where there was a strong smell of beer and sauerkraut. The little band of five players were performing at the time. Justin was not playing the flute, but the double bass, and he looked weedier than ever behind the enormous instrument.

Maigret sat down at one of the marble tables, hesitated, finally ordered a plate of sauerkraut and a beer. Once the music had stopped Minard joined him.

“I’m sorry I had to ask you to come here; but it was important that I should have a word with you before you saw her.”

He was very excited, perhaps a little anxious, and Maigret felt anxious himself, as a result.

“I’d forgotten her sister would have a different name, now she’s married. So I wasted time looking for her. Her husband works on the railway. He’s a convoyeur and he’s often away for two or three days at a stretch. They live in a cottage in the fields, on the slope of a hill, with a white nanny-goat tethered to a stake, and vegetable plots behind a picket fence.”

“Was Germaine there?”

“When I arrived, they were both sitting at the table in front of a huge dish of black pudding, and there was a terrible smell of onions.”

“The sister still hadn’t had her baby?”

“Not yet. They are expecting it. It seems it may take several days yet. I told them I was an insurance agent, that I’d heard the young lady was going to have a baby, that it was the ideal moment to take out a policy.”

The violinist, who was also the band leader, tapped his desk with the end of his bow, and Justin, excusing himself, climbed up onto the platform. When he came back, he hastened to say:

“Don’t worry. I think everything will turn out all right. I know a good deal about the insurance business, because my wife’s got a bee in her bonnet about it. She claims I’ve only three years to live and that... But it’s of no importance! This

Germaine is quite a pretty girl, well-covered, her hair in a large bun which she has to keep hitching up all the time, eyes which have an odd effect on you. You'll see! She didn't take her eyes off me. She asked me point-blank which company I was working for. I named one, at random, and then she wanted to know who was the head of my department. She asked me a whole heap of other questions and at last she declared:

“ ‘*For three months I had a boyfriend who was in the same company.*’

“Then, without changing her voice:

“ ‘*Is it Louis who's sent you?*’ ”

He had to climb back onto the platform again, and all the way through a Viennese waltz he winked at Maigret, as if to reassure him. He seemed to be saying: “Don't worry! Wait and hear what happened next!”

This is what happened next:

“I told her it wasn't Louis.

“ ‘*And it wasn't the count either,*’ she answered back.

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘*As for Monsieur Richard... Why now, you wouldn't be one of Monsieur Richard's men, by any chance?*’

“You see the sort of girl she is? I had to make a quick decision. Her sister is younger than she. She's only been married a year. She was a maid of all work somewhere round Saint-Lazare, where she met her husband. Germaine didn't mind shocking her. If you want my opinion, she's a girl with a passion for shocking people. Whatever happens she must make herself interesting, if you see what I mean?

“She's probably dreamt of becoming an actress. After lunch, she started smoking a cigarette, and she's no idea how to smoke.

“There's only one room in the house, with a double bed and an enlargement of a wedding photograph in an oval frame.

“ ‘*You're sure you're not one of Monsieur Richard's men?*’

“She’s got bulging eyes, and sometimes when she’s talking to you, she has a fixed stare. It’s embarrassing. You might think she’d suddenly gone out of her mind, but that’s only an impression, since she’s got her head screwed on all right.

“ ‘*You see, Olga,*’ she remarked to her sister, in an impatient tone, ‘*how complicated life in that sort of world can be. I told you no good would come of it.*’

“I asked her when she intended going back to work.

“ ‘*I don’t think I’ll ever set foot in that hole again.*’

“And she still wanted to know... Well...”

Music! The flautist gave Maigret a look begging him to be patient, not to grow anxious.

“Here I am again! It can’t be helped if I did the wrong thing. I told her the truth.”

“What truth?”

“How the young lady had called for help, how Louis punched me in the face, how you went there, and they showed you a girl in a nightdress, pretending she was Germaine. She became furious. I made it quite clear that there was no official investigation, that you were dealing with the case in a private capacity and would be glad to see her, and before I finished speaking, she began getting dressed. I can still see her now in her knickers and petticoat, rummaging in her travelling-case, apologizing to her sister.

“ ‘*You understand,*’ she said to her, ‘*a baby will always arrive in the end, whereas for me it’s a matter of life or death.*’

“I was embarrassed, but I thought it would be useful for you to hear what she had to say. I didn’t know where to take her. I’ve left her in your flat. I was able to whisper to your wife on the landing. My God, what a sweet woman you’ve married! I asked her not to let her run away.

“Are you cross with me?”

How could anyone be cross with him? Maigret wasn’t very reassured; nevertheless, he sighed:

“It’s probably all for the best.”

“When shall I see you?”

He remembered he had to meet the cabby, Cornille, at midnight.

“Later tonight, perhaps.”

“If I don’t see you, I’ll call in at your place tomorrow morning, if I may, now that I know the house. Oh! One more thing...”

He looked troubled, hesitated.

“She asked me who would pay her expenses, and I told her... I didn’t know what to answer... I told her not to worry... But, of course, if it’s awkward for you, I’ll...”

This time, Maigret left during the item of music and hurried off to the métro entrance. He had an odd feeling of excitement as he saw the light under his front door and he had no need to take his key from his pocket, since Madame Maigret always recognized his step.

She gave him a knowing look, as she remarked gaily:

“There’s a charming girl waiting for you.”

Dear Madame Maigret! She wasn’t being sarcastic. She wanted to be kind. The creature was there, her elbows on the table, a dirty plate before her, a cigarette in her mouth. Her large eyes fastened onto Maigret as if she wanted to eat him. Yet, she hesitated once more.

“You really are in the police?”

He showed her his card instead of replying, and from then on she didn’t take her eyes off him. There was a small glass in front of her: Madame Maigret had brought out the kirsch she kept for special occasions.

“I suppose you’ve not had your dinner?”

“Yes, I’ve had dinner.”

“In that case, I’ll leave you two. I must do the washing up.”

She cleared the table, went out into the kitchen, hesitated a moment before shutting the door.

“Is your friend in the police, too?”

“No. Not exactly. It was only by chance...”

“Is he married?”

“Yes. I think so.”

He was feeling a little uncomfortable, in his familiar surroundings, with this strange girl who was acting as if she were in her own home, getting up, arranging her bun in front of the mirror over the fireplace, then installing herself in Madame Maigret’s armchair, murmuring:

“You don’t mind, do you?”

He asked her:

“Have you known Mademoiselle Gendreau long?”

“We were at school together.”

“You come from Anseval, I suppose? You were schoolgirls together at the school at Anseval?”

He was surprised that the Balthazar coffee heiress should have been educated in a little village school.

“I mean that we’re the same age, a few months’ difference. She’ll be twenty-one next month, and I’ve been that for a fortnight.”

“And both of you went to school at Anseval?” he repeated.

“Not her. She was at the convent in Nevers. But it was at the same time.”

He understood. And from then on he was on his guard, careful to sort the false from the true, the true from what was almost true or possibly true.

“Were you expecting something to happen in the Rue Chaptal?”

“I always thought things would turn out badly.”

“Why?”

“Because they hate each other.”

“Who do?”

“Mademoiselle and her brother. I’ve been in the house for four years. I started there straight after the death of the mistress. You know, don’t you, that she died in a railway accident, when she was going to take the waters at Vittel? It was awful.”

She spoke about it as if she had been present when they had dug out the hundred-odd bodies from the wreckage of the carriages.

“While Madame was alive, you see, the will was of no importance.”

“You know a lot about the family.”

“I was born at Anseval. My father was born there. My grandfather, who was one of the count’s farmers, used to play billiards with the old gentleman.”

“What old gentleman?”

“That’s how they still talk about him down in the country. Don’t you know anything? I thought the police would be wise to all that.”

“You mean the elder Monsieur Balthazar, I suppose.”

“Yes, Monsieur Hector. His father was the village saddler. And he also used to ring the bells at church. When he was twelve, Monsieur Hector became a pedlar. He went round the farms with his box on his back.”

“Was he the one who founded Balthazar coffee?”

“Yes. It didn’t stop my grandfather being an old pal of his, right to the end. He was away a long time before he came down to the country again. When he did return, he was already rich, and it got about that he had bought the château.”

“Who owned the château?”

“The Comte d’Anseval, for heaven’s sake.”

“And there’s no longer a Comte d’Anseval?”

“Yes, there’s one still. Mademoiselle’s friend. Wouldn’t you let me have another little glass of liqueur? Is it the local liqueur from your part of the world?”

“From my wife’s.”

“When I think of that sour-puss—I don’t mean your wife—having the cheek to pass herself off as me and sleep in my bed! You really saw her in a nightdress? She’s fatter than me. I could tell you a thing or two about her body. Her breasts, look...”

“So the old Balthazar, the head of the coffee business, bought the Château d’Anseval. Was he married?”

“He’d been married but his wife was already dead by that time. He had a daughter, a beautiful woman, much too proud. He had a son, too, Monsieur Hubert, who’s been a good-for-nothing. The boy was as soft as his sister was hard. He used to travel a lot, in foreign countries.”

“This all happened before you were born?”

“Of course. But things are still the same!”

Automatically, Maigret had taken a notebook from his pocket and was writing down the names, rather as if he had drawn a genealogical tree. He felt that precision was necessary with a girl like Germaine.

“So, first of all there was Hector Balthazar, the one you call the old gentleman. How long ago did he die?”

“Five years. Just a year before his daughter.”

And Maigret, thinking of Félicien Gendreau, who was himself an old man, was surprised and said:

“He must have been getting on?”

“He was eighty-eight. He used to live alone, in an enormous house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. He still ran his business himself, with the help of his daughter.”

“Not his son?”

“Not on your life! His son wasn’t even allowed to set foot inside the offices. They gave him an allowance. He lives on

the quays, not far from the Pont-Neuf. He's a kind of artist."

"Just a moment... Avenue du Bois... His daughter married Félicien Gendreau."

"That's right. But Monsieur Félicien isn't allowed to have any say in the business either."

"Why not?"

"They had tried, it seems, a long time ago... He was a gambler... He still spends all his afternoons at the races, nowadays... They claim he got into some sort of trouble over credit notes, or cheques. His father-in-law wouldn't even speak to him again."

In time to come Maigret was to get to know the house in the Avenue du Bois, one of the ugliest, most ornamented houses in Paris, with sham medieval towers and stained-glass windows. He was also to see a photograph of the old man, with his clear-cut features, his chalky complexion, his long white side-whiskers and the frock-coat concealing all but two strips of stiff shirt-front on either side of his black cravat.

Had he been better informed about the social life of Paris he would have known that old Balthazar had bequeathed his house to the state, with all the pictures he had collected, on condition that it was turned into a museum. There had been much talk about it at his death. For more than a year the experts had argued, and the government had finally declined the legacy, because most of the paintings were found not to be genuine.

One day Maigret would also see the portrait of the daughter, her hair drawn back low on her neck, a profile like the Empress Eugenie's, her face as cold as that of the founder of the dynasty.

As for Félicien Gendreau, he had met him, with his tinted moustache, his gold-knobbed cane.

"From what I can gather the old man hated everybody, including his son, then his son-in-law, then Monsieur Richard as well, whom he knew quite well. He only made exceptions for his daughter and his grand-daughter, Mademoiselle Lise.

He said they alone took after him and he left a complicated will. Monsieur Braquement could tell you all about that.”

“Who’s Monsieur Braquement?”

“His lawyer. He’s in his eighties. All the others are scared of him, because he’s the only one who knows.”

“Who knows what?”

“They haven’t told me. It’s all due to be explained when Mademoiselle Lise turns twenty-one, and that’s why they’re all in such a state at the moment. As for me I’m not on one side or the other. If I’d wanted to...”

He had an inspiration.

“Monsieur Richard?” he said, playing along with her.

“He flirted with me enough. I told him straight to his face that he was on the wrong horse and I advised him to transfer his affections to Marie.

“ ‘That one’s stupid enough to let you do it,’ I told him, just like that.”

“Did he take your advice?”

“I’ve no idea. You never know with that lot. If you want my opinion—and I should know them—they’re all a bit off their heads.”

Even as she said that her eyes were bulging more than ever, her stare becoming more embarrassingly hard. She leant towards Maigret. She looked as if she were going to grasp hold of his knees.

“Louis’s a native of Anseval, isn’t he?”

“He’s the son of the retired schoolmaster. Some say his father was really the priest.”

“Is he on Monsieur Richard’s side?”

“What do you mean? Not a bit of it. He spends all his time running around after Mademoiselle. He stayed on with the old man until he died. It was he who looked after him during his

illness and he should know more about things than anyone, perhaps even more than Monsieur Braquement.”

“Has he ever tried to make love to you?”

“Him?”

And she burst out laughing.

“He’d find it a bit hard if he tried! He looks like a man all right, with all that black hair. But in the first place he’s much older than you’d guess. He’s at least fifty-five. And he’s not a real man. You know what I mean? That’s why Madame Louis and Albert...”

“I’m sorry. Who’s Albert?”

“The valet. He comes from Anseval as well. He was a jockey until he was twenty-one.”

“Pardon me again. I was shown all over the house and I didn’t see a room where...”

“Because he sleeps above the stables, with Jérôme.”

“Jérôme?”

“Monsieur Félicien’s coachman. Only Arsène, the chauffeur, who’s married and has a baby, sleeps out.”

By this stage Maigret had scribbled down names at all angles over the page from his notebook.

“If somebody did shoot at Mademoiselle, and that wouldn’t surprise me, it must have been Monsieur Richard, during one of their quarrels.”

“Do they often quarrel?”

“Just about every day. Once he gripped her by the wrists so hard that she had blue rings round them for a week. But she fights back, and he’s had his share of good kicks on the shins and probably even a bit higher. But I bet it wasn’t Mademoiselle who was being shot at.”

“Who then?”

“The count!”

“Which count?”

“Can’t you follow anything? The Comte d’Anseval.”

“Of course! There’s still a Comte d’Anseval.”

“The grandson of the one who sold the château to old Balthazar. It was Mademoiselle who came across him again, I’ve no idea where.”

“Is he rich?”

“Him? He hasn’t got a penny.”

“And he visits the house?”

“He visits Mademoiselle.”

“Does he... I mean...”

“You want to know if he sleeps with her? I don’t think he wanted to. Do you follow now? They’re all crackers. They fight like dogs. Monsieur Hubert’s the only one who isn’t mixed up in anything, and the other two, the brother and sister, are each trying to get him on their own side.”

“You mean Hubert Balthazar, the old man’s son? What age is he?”

“Maybe fifty? Maybe a little more? He’s very nice, very distinguished. Whenever he comes he has a chat with me. Now look, by this time of night the last train for Conflans has gone and I’ll have to sleep somewhere. Have you a bed here?”

There was something so provocative in her look that Maigret gave a little cough and glanced automatically towards the kitchen door.

“Unfortunately we haven’t a spare bedroom. We’ve only just moved in.”

“You’re newly-weds?”

And in her mouth the words seemed almost indecent.

“I’ll find you a room in a hotel near here.”

“You’re going to bed already?”

“I’ve still got to meet someone in town.”

“They say a policeman doesn’t often sleep in his own bed. It’s funny, but you don’t look like a policeman at all. I knew one once, a police-constable, tall, very dark, Léonard...”

Maigret preferred not to hear about him. She seemed to have known a lot of men, besides the insurance agent.

“I suppose you’ll still be needing me? One thing I could do would be to go back to their place as if nothing was wrong. I could tell you every evening what had been happening.”

They could hear the sound of pots and pans in the kitchen, but it wasn’t for that reason that Maigret did not accept the offer she had made him. Germaine literally terrified him.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. If you’ll come with me...”

Before putting on her hat and coat, she tidied her hair once more in front of the mirror, picked up the bottle of kirsch:

“May I? I’ve been talking so much, thinking so much! You don’t drink yourself?”

It wasn’t worth the trouble telling her the number of little glasses of calvados he had swallowed down, willingly or unwillingly, during the day.

“I’ve certainly still got a lot of things to tell you. Some people write novels, who haven’t lived a quarter as much as I’ve done. If I started writing...”

He went into the kitchen, kissed his wife on her forehead. She looked at him gaily, with a malicious glint in her eyes.

“I may be late home.”

And she, teasing:

“Take your time, Jules!”

There was a boarding-house a few houses before the Boulevard Voltaire. In the street, Germaine had resolutely taken hold of her companion’s arm.

“It’s my Louis XV heels...”

Good Lord! She was much more accustomed to clogs!

“I think your wife is very nice. She’s an extremely good cook.”

He didn’t risk giving her the money for the room. He went into the office of the hotel and blushed when the night porter asked him:

“Is it for the night or just for a little while?”

“For the night. For Mademoiselle only...”

While the man was examining the key rack, Germaine clung more insistently to his arm, without any excuse for it now that she’d stopped walking.

“Number 18. The second floor, on the left. Wait while I get you the towels.”

Maigret preferred not to remember how they had parted. There was a strip of red carpet on the stairs. She was holding her two towels in one hand, her key, with a copper plate attached to it, in the other. The porter had buried himself in his newspaper again.

“You’re sure you’ve no more questions to ask me?”

She was waiting on the first step. Her eyes were bulging, more staring than ever. Why did he think of the praying-mantis, which eats her mate after coitus?

“No... Not tonight...” he managed to mumble.

“I was forgetting you’ve got to meet someone.”

She had curled her moist lips, sarcastically.

“Tomorrow, then?”

“Yes, tomorrow.”

At least that’s how it must have happened. Maigret wasn’t yet used to such things. He remembered only the smell of carbolic as he rushed down the métro steps, the click of the automatic gates, a long journey in the greyness of the underground, with figures which jogged with every movement of the train, faces picked out by the electric light, sleepy eyes.

He got lost in the empty, ill-lit streets near the Porte de la Villette, eventually found a vast depot packed with resting cabs, their shafts in the air, and, at the back, across a courtyard, the warm smell of the stables.

“Cornille? No, he hasn’t come in yet. Do you mind waiting for him?”

Not until half past twelve did a totally drunk cab-driver stare at him in astonishment.

“The little lady from the Rue Chaptal? Now wait a moment! She was the one who tipped me a franc. And the tall dark fellow...”

“Which tall dark fellow?”

“The one who stopped me in the Rue Blanche, of course, and told me to go and wait in the Rue Chaptal, outside... number... It’s funny, I can’t ever remember figures... Although in my profession...”

“You drove her to the station?”

“To the station? Which station?”

His eyes were drowning in water, and Maigret almost got the juice from his tobacco quid on his trousers as he spat a long stream straight in front of him.

“In the first place it wasn’t to the station... And then... And then...”

Maigret, in turn, slipped a franc into his hand.

“It was to the hotel in a little square opposite the Tuileries... Wait a minute... The name of a famous building... I’m always mixing up the names of these buildings... The Hôtel du Louvre... Giddyup, Cocotte...”

All the trains, buses and trams had stopped running, and Maigret had to trudge on foot along the endless Rue de Flandre, before he came to the lights of a livelier part of the city.

The Brasserie Clichy would be shut, and Justin Minard was probably back in his rooms in the Rue d’Enghien, where he

would be explaining things to his wife.

Chapter V

« ^ »

He was shaving in front of his mirror, hooked on to the handle of the window in the dining-room. It was becoming a habit of his to follow his wife around, in any of the rooms, perhaps because these were their happiest moments of intimacy. Certainly Madame Maigret had one very admirable quality: she was as fresh and lively first thing in the morning as in the middle of the afternoon. They would open the windows, breathe in the new air. They could hear a blacksmith's hammer, the noise of lorries, horses neighing, they could even see the warm steam from the dung when the stables were being cleaned at the removers' premises a few doors along.

"Do you think she's really mad?"

"If she'd stayed home in her village, got married and had ten children, it would probably have caused no comment. Perhaps they wouldn't have had the same father, that's all."

"Look, Jules! I think that's your friend walking up and down the pavement."

He leaned out, his face covered with soap, recognized Justin Minard waiting for him patiently.

"Won't you ask him to come up?"

"It's not worth it. I'll be ready in five minutes. Are you going out today?"

Maigret asked her so rarely what she was going to do during the day that she guessed straight away.

"You want me to chaperone the young lady?"

"I may have to ask you to do so. If I let her loose in Paris, and since she must talk at any price, God knows who she'll pick up and what she'll say."

"You're going to see her now?"

"Right away."

"She'll be in bed."

“Possibly.”

“I bet you’ll have trouble getting rid of her.”

When he came out of the entrance hall Minard greeted him, started walking beside him, perfectly naturally, asking him:

“What are we doing today, Chief?”

And years later Maigret was to remember that the little flautist had been the first person to call him chief.

“You saw her? Did you get any clues? I hardly slept at all. Just as I was going to sleep I thought of something we don’t know the answer to.”

Their footsteps rang out on the pavement of the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir. At the far end they could see the busy traffic on the Boulevard Voltaire.

“If a shot was fired somebody was obviously being fired at. Well, I wonder whether they got him. I’m not boring you?”

Quite the opposite, since it was something Maigret had been wondering himself.

“Suppose the bullet hit nobody... Obviously it’s difficult to put oneself in the place of people like that... But it seems to me that if nobody was killed or hurt, they wouldn’t have gone to all the trouble of preparing that stage-set... You see what I mean? After I was thrown out, they got busy arranging the bedroom to make it look as if nobody had set foot in it... And another thing: you remember that while the butler was trying to push me out, a voice from the first floor landing called out:

“ ‘Hurry up, Louis!’

“As if something was wrong upstairs, don’t you think? And if they had to bundle the young lady into the maid’s bedroom, it was probably because she was too upset to play her part...

“I’ve nothing on all day. You can send me where you like...”

Next to the boarding-house where Germaine had spent the night was a café with a terrace, white marble tables, a waiter with side-whiskers, looking as if he’d stepped straight out of

an advertisement, who was cleaning the windows with soapstone.

“Wait for me here.”

He had hesitated. He had almost sent Minard upstairs in his place. If he had been asked why he wanted to see Germaine, he would have found it difficult to answer. Certainly, on this particular morning, he would have liked to be in several different places at once. He almost hankered after the Vieux Calvados and was sorry that he couldn't be behind the windows watching the activities of the house in the Rue Chaptal. Now that he knew a little more about the persons concerned, he felt that a glimpse of Richard Gendreau getting into the car, or of his father walking towards his carriage, or Louis taking the air on the pavement, would hold some precise significance for him.

He would also have liked to be at the Hôtel du Louvre, in the Avenue du Bois, and even at Anseval.

But of all these characters, whom he hadn't known at all two days earlier, there was only one accessible to him, and he instinctively clung to that one.

It may be odd but this feeling had its roots in his dreams as a child, as an adolescent. Although the death of his father had interrupted his medical studies after their second year, he had never really intended to become a proper doctor, to care for the sick.

To tell the truth, the profession he had always wanted to practise did not exist. Even when quite young, he had always felt that lots of people in his village were not in their right niche, were treading paths which were not theirs, solely because they were not aware.

And he used to imagine a very intelligent man, above all a very understanding man, doctor and priest at once, as it were, a man who would at first glance understand the destinies of others.

What he had said to his wife about Germaine a while ago was along those lines: if she had stayed at Anseval...

People would have come to consult this man just as they consulted a doctor. In a manner of speaking he would have been a repairer of destinies. Not only because he was intelligent. Maybe he wouldn't have needed to be exceptionally intelligent? But because he was able to live the lives of every sort of man, to put himself inside everybody's mind.

Maigret had never mentioned this to anybody; he didn't dare think about it too much, or he would have started laughing at himself. Unable to finish his medical studies, he had entered the police force, almost by accident. Was it really such an accident?

And are not policemen actually repairers of destinies sometimes?

All through the past night, sometimes awake, sometimes dreaming, he had been living with these people he had scarcely met, about whom he knew almost nothing, beginning with the old Balthazar who had died five years earlier, and now, as he knocked on her door, he was taking the whole family with him into Germaine's bedroom.

"Come in!" answered a husky voice.

Then, quickly:

"Wait a minute! I forgot the door's locked."

She shuffled across the carpet in her bare feet. She was in her nightdress, her hair falling down her back, a heavy swelling bosom. Yet she must have been awake for some time, because on a tray on her bedside table were an empty chocolate jug and the crumbs of a croissant.

"Do we have to go out? Must I get dressed?"

"Either slip something on or go back to bed. I only wanted to have a chat with you."

"Doesn't it feel funny having all those clothes on, with me just in my nightdress?"

"No."

"Your wife's not jealous?"

“No. I’d like you to tell me about the Comte d’Anseval. Or rather... You know the house and everybody who lives there, and who calls there... Imagine that it’s one o’clock... One o’clock in the morning... A quarrel starts in Mademoiselle’s bedroom... Follow me carefully... Who, in your opinion, might have been in the room?”

She had begun combing her hair in front of the mirror, showing the red tufts in her armpits, and he could see her pink skin through her thin nightdress. She was making an effort to think.

“Louis?” he asked, helping her.

“No. It would be too late for Louis to be upstairs.”

“Just a moment. Something I had forgotten. Louis was fully dressed, in his evening clothes, a stiff white shirt, a black tie. Does he usually go to bed late?”

“Sometimes. But then, he doesn’t keep that get-up on. There must have been a visitor in the house.”

“Could Hubert Balthazar, for example, Mademoiselle Gendreau’s uncle, have been in his niece’s bedroom?”

“I can’t see him being there at one o’clock in the morning.”

“If he had, where would she have entertained him? In the drawing-rooms on the ground floor, I suppose?”

“Not at all. It’s not like that at the Rue Chaptal. They all lead their separate lives. The drawing-rooms are only for parties. The rest of the time they each hide in their own hole.”

“Might Richard Gendreau have gone up to see his sister?”

“Certainly. He often did. Particularly when he was in a temper.”

“Did he sometimes carry a revolver? Have you ever seen a revolver in his hand?”

“No.”

“And Mademoiselle Gendreau?”

“Just a moment! Monsieur Richard has got a revolver, two of them, a big one and a small one, but they’re kept in his office. Mademoiselle’s got one as well, with a mother-of-pearl butt, in the drawer of her bedside table. She puts it out on the table every night.”

“Is she nervous?”

“No. She’s suspicious. Like all those la-di-da women she imagines the others are getting at her the whole time. She’s a miser already, at her age. She leaves money lying around on purpose, after she’s counted it, to find out if anybody’s stealing from her. The maid before Marie was taken in by it and got the sack.”

“Has she ever received the count in her bedroom?”

“Perhaps not in her bedroom exactly, but next door, in her boudoir.”

“At one o’clock in the morning?”

“Probably. I once read a historical novel about Queen Elizabeth of England... You know who I mean? It was only a story, but it must be true... She was a cold woman, who couldn’t make love. I shouldn’t be surprised if that’s what’s wrong with Mademoiselle.”

The comb was crackling through her hair, and she was bending her back, occasionally looking at Maigret in the mirror.

“I’m not like that, thank God!”

“If Monsieur Richard heard a noise on the second floor, might he have gone upstairs with his revolver?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“To do what?”

“To surprise his sister’s lover...”

“He wouldn’t care two hoots about that. Money’s the only thing those people worry about.”

She was still preening herself in front of him, unaware that he was far away from her, up there in the bedroom at the Rue

Chaptal, trying to put everybody in their place, like a stage director.

“Has the Comte d’Anseval ever gone there with a friend?”

“He might have, but then he’d have been entertained downstairs, and I seldom went down there.”

“Did Mademoiselle Lise sometimes telephone him?”

“I don’t think he’s on the telephone. She never rang him up; he rang up sometimes, probably from a café.”

“What did she call him?”

“Jacques, of course.”

“How old is he?”

“Maybe twenty-five. He’s a good-looking boy, a bit of a rip, though. He always seems to be laughing at everybody.”

“Is he the type to carry a gun?”

“Certainly.”

“Why are you so positive?”

“Because he’s just the type. You’ve read *Fantômes*?”

“Is Monsieur Félicien, the father, on his daughter’s side or his son’s?”

“On no one’s. Or rather he’s on my side, if you want to know. Sometimes he’s come into my bedroom, in his slippers, at eight o’clock in the morning, pretending he wanted me to sew on a button for him.

“The others hardly pay any attention to him. The servants call him Old Chips, or sometimes Moustachios. Apart from Albert, who’s his private valet, nobody bothers what he says. They know it’s never important. Once I said to him, straight to his face:

“ ‘If you go on exciting yourself like this you’ll have an attack. It won’t do you any good!’

“That didn’t stop him starting again. He tried Marie next and I don’t know whether she let him...

“Now you don’t mind watching a woman get dressed, do you?”

Maigret stood up, looked for his hat.

“Where are you going? You’re not going to leave me all by myself?”

“I’ve got several important things to do. My friend, who fetched you, will come and keep you company in a moment.”

“Where is he?”

“Downstairs.”

“Why did you come up without him? You had a little idea at the back of your head, hadn’t you? You’re scared! Is it because of your wife?”

She had already poured water into the basin to wash in, and Maigret could see the moment coming when she would let her nightdress fall, its shoulder straps were slipping a little more each time she moved.

“I shall probably see you again during the day,” he said, opening the door.

And he rejoined Justin Minard, drinking a cup of coffee in the sun, which was shining obliquely onto the terrace. ”

“Your wife was here a moment ago.”

“What?”

“Just after you left home an express letter arrived. She ran out hoping to catch you. I guessed she was looking for you.”

Maigret sat down, ordered a beer, automatically, not thinking how early it was, and tore open the envelope. The note was signed Maxime Le Bret.

I should like you to call and see me at the office before noon,

Yours sincerely,

It had obviously been written at the Boulevard de Courcelles, because Le Bret would have used the headed note-paper if he had been at the station. He was very meticulous

about formalities. He had at least four different sorts of visiting cards, intended for precise purposes:

M. et Mme. Le Bret de Plouhinec; Maxime Le Bret de Plouhinec; Maxime Le Bret, Officier de la Légion d'Honneur; Maxime Le Bret, Superintendent of Police...

This note, written in his own hand, marked a new degree of intimacy between him and his secretary, and he must have had difficulty knowing how to begin it. My dear Maigret? Dear sir? Sir? In the end, he had got out of it by not putting anything.

“Tell me, Minard, have you really got time to spare?”

“As much as you like!”

“The young lady’s upstairs. I don’t know when I’ll be free. I’m afraid that she’ll walk around to the Rue Chaptal and start talking if she’s let loose.”

“I understand.”

“If you go out with her, leave me word where you are. If you’ve got something you want to do, take her to my wife.”

A quarter of an hour later, he entered the police station, and his colleagues looked at him with that rather envious admiration reserved for staff on holiday or on a special mission, or those who, by some miracle, can avoid a fixed timetable and the humdrum daily round.

“Has the superintendent come in?”

“A long time ago.”

There was the same nuance in the way he welcomed Maigret as in his note. He even shook hands with him, a thing he was not in the habit of doing.

“I’m not going to ask you what stage your investigations have reached as I suppose it’s still a little too early. Why I asked you to come and see me... I want you to understand me properly, because it’s a delicate matter. Of course, what I learn in the Boulevard de Courcelles has nothing to do with myself as superintendent. On the other hand...”

He was walking up and down the office, his face fresh, relaxed, smoking a gold-tipped cigarette.

“It’s hard for me to let you tramp round for lack of a piece of information. Yesterday evening Mademoiselle Gendreau telephoned my wife...”

“Did she phone from the Hôtel du Louvre?”

“You know that?”

“She was driven there by cab during the afternoon.”

“In that case... That’s all... I know how difficult it can be to find out what’s going on in certain houses...”

He was looking a little worried, as if he was wondering what else Maigret might have found out.

“She doesn’t intend going back to the Rue Chaptal, and she’s considering opening up her grandfather’s house again.”

“In the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.”

“Yes. I see you already know quite a few things.”

Then Maigret grew bolder.

“Do you mind if I ask you whether you know the Comte d’Anseval?”

Surprised, Le Bret frowned, like a man having difficulty understanding. He pondered for a while.

“Ah, yes! The Balthazars bought the Château d’Anseval. That’s right, isn’t it? But I don’t see the connection.”

“Mademoiselle Gendreau and the Comte d’Anseval have been seeing each other often.”

“Are you sure about that? It seems rather strange.”

“Do you know the count?”

“Not personally, I’m glad to say. But I’ve heard about him. What astonishes me... Unless they knew each other as children, or perhaps she doesn’t know... Bob d’Anseval has turned out a very bad sort. Nobody will have him in their homes any more; he doesn’t belong to any club, and I think the society squad has had quite a lot of trouble from him.”

“You don’t know his address?”

“From what I hear, he hangs about various shady bars in the Avenue de Wagram and round the Place des Ternes. Perhaps they’d know more about him in the society squad.”

“Would you allow me to make some inquiries there?”

“As long as you don’t mention the Gendreau-Balthazars.”

He was plainly concerned. Once or twice he murmured to himself:

“Very strange.”

And Maigret, more and more daring, asked him:

“Is Mademoiselle Gendreau a normal person, in your opinion?”

This time Le Bret gave a start, and at once glanced at his secretary with unintended severity.

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’m sorry if I put the question badly. I’m certain now that it was really Lise Gendreau I saw in the maid’s bedroom, that night. So something pretty serious must have happened in her own bedroom which made this subterfuge necessary, and I’ve no reason to doubt the word of the musician, who was walking along the street and heard a shot fired.”

“Go on.”

“It’s likely that Mademoiselle Gendreau was not alone with her brother in her apartment that night.”

“What do you mean?”

“In all likelihood the third person was the Comte d’Anseval. If a shot was fired, if there were in fact three people in the room, if somebody was hit...”

At heart, Maigret was proud of the glance of astonishment his chief gave him.

“Have you obtained further information?”

“Not much.”

“I thought you’d been shown over the whole house?”

“Except for the rooms above the stables and the garage.”

For a moment, and for the first time, the drama was brought home to him. Le Bret was accepting the possibility of there having been a bloody incident, a murder, a crime.

And it had happened in his own circle, among people he visited, whom he met in his club, the family of a girl who was a close friend of his own wife’s.

The odd thing was, that on seeing his chief so visibly affected Maigret himself sensed the drama of the moment, too. It was no longer merely a problem to be solved. There was a human life, perhaps lives, involved.

“Mademoiselle Gendreau is very wealthy,” the superintendent sighed at last, regretfully. “She’s probably the sole heiress to one of the five or six largest fortunes in Paris.”

“Probably.”

His chief knew a good deal more, but he was obviously unwilling to let the man of the world come to the aid of the police superintendent, which he also was.

“You see, Maigret, very large interests are at stake. From her childhood Lise Gendreau has known she is the focal point. She’s never been just an ordinary little girl... She’s always been conscious that she’s the heiress of the Balthazar Coffee, and even more, the spiritual heiress of Hector Balthazar.”

He added, sadly:

“She’s an unfortunate child.”

Then, interested:

“You’re sure all this you said about d’Anseval is true?”

The subject was intriguing the man of the world, who, in spite of everything, remained incredulous.

“He has often paid a visit to Mademoiselle Gendreau, late in the evening, if not in her bedroom, at any rate in her boudoir on the second floor.”

“That’s different.”

Was this distinction between the bedroom and the boudoir sufficient to allay his doubts?

“I should be grateful if you would let me ask you one more question, Superintendent. Has Mademoiselle Gendreau ever declared her intention of getting married? Is she interested in men? Do you think she’s what they call a frigid woman?”

Le Bret was flabbergasted. He looked with amazement at this mere secretary, suddenly speaking to him like that, and about people with whom he had never come into contact. There was something admiring in his look, despite himself, but a hint of anxiety as well, as if he had suddenly come face to face with a magician.

“There’s a lot of gossip about her. It’s known that she’s refused some brilliant matches.”

“Is she supposed to have had any love affairs?”

The superintendent was obviously not telling the truth when he answered:

“I don’t know.”

Then, more dryly:

“I’m afraid I can’t allow you to ask such questions about my wife’s friends. You see, young man...”

He had almost been off-hand with him, as he might well have been in the Boulevard de Courcelles, but he controlled himself in time.

“... *our* profession demands infinite prudence and tact. I even wonder...”

Maigret felt a chill run down his spine. He was going to have his case taken out of his hands, be forced to return to his place behind his black desk, to spend all day once more copying reports into the records book and writing out certificates of hardship.

For a few seconds the sentence was left hanging in the air. Fortunately the servant of the Republic won over the man of

the world.

“Believe me, you’ll have to be very, very careful. If need be and you’re worried about something, telephone me at my home. I think I’ve already told you to do that. You’ve got my number?”

He wrote it for him on a scrap of paper.

“I only asked you to come here this morning because I didn’t want you to be floundering about. I didn’t imagine you’d have already made so much progress.”

However he did not shake his hand when they said good-bye. Maigret had become a policeman again, and a policeman who was taking the risk of barging into a society where a visiting card such as: *M. et Mme. Le Bret de Plouhinec* furnished the only means of entry.

It was not quite midday. When Maigret had gone into the entrance hall of the Quai des Orfèvres he had noticed, in passing, the room on the left, which was papered with the hotels squad’s registration cards. He had climbed up the wide staircase, thick with dust, not, as had happened before, as the bearer of a message from the district station, but in a way on his own private business.

He had seen the doors with the inspectors’ names on them all along the corridor, the glass wall of the waiting-room, an inspector going past accompanied by a man in handcuffs.

Now he was in an office, with windows onto the Seine, an office that had nothing in common with the one at his district station. Men were sitting there, telephones or report sheets in front of them; an inspector, resting his thigh on the table, was calmly smoking a pipe; it was alive, it was humming, in an atmosphere of casual friendliness.

“Look, old man, there’s nothing to stop you going up to the Records Office, but I don’t think there’d be a file on him, because as far as I’m aware he’s never been convicted.”

A sergeant, about forty years old, was good-naturedly treating him like a choir-boy. This was the society squad. The

sort of world in which the Comte d'Anseval operated, these people knew like the back of their hands.

"I say, Vanel, have you come across the count lately?"

"Bob?"

"Yes."

"The last time I ran into him was at the races, and he was with Dédé."

They explained to him:

"Dédé's a chap who runs a garage in the Rue des Acacias. A garage where there's never more than one or two cars. You get what I mean, my lad?"

"Cocaine?"

"That, of course. And maybe one or two other little rackets on the side. Not counting the women. The Count, as he's called, is in it up to his neck. We could have pinned something on him two or three times already, but we prefer to keep an eye on him in the hope that he'll put us on to bigger fish."

"Have you got his latest address?"

"Don't tell me your super's going to poach in our waters? You be careful, my lad! Mustn't put the wind up Bob. Not that he interests us personally, but a boy like that, playing fast and loose the whole time, can often lead us a long way. Is it serious, this business?"

"I really have to find him."

"You've got the address, Vanel?"

The latter grumbled; like the rest of them at the Quai des Orfèvres, he despised the small fry from the local stations.

"At the Hôtel du Centre, Rue Brey. Just behind the Étoile."

"When was he there last?"

"I saw him with his tart in a bistro on the corner of the Rue Brey about four days ago."

"Can you tell me her name?"

“Lucile. You can’t miss her. She’s got a scar on her left cheek.”

A chief-inspector came in, busily, papers in his hand.

“Tell me, boys...”

He stopped when he noticed a stranger in his inspectors’ room, and he looked at them inquiringly.

“The secretary from the Saint-Georges District Station.”

“Oh!”

And this “Oh!” only made Maigret wish even more desperately to belong to the “Building”. He was nothing! Less than nothing! Nobody was paying any further attention to him. The chief-inspector was bending over the detective-sergeant, discussing with him a raid they were to carry out in the neighbourhood of the Rue de la Roquette.

As he was not so far from the Place de la République, he decided to go home to lunch before going over to the Étoile area on the track of Lucile and the count.

He was about to turn the corner into the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir when he noticed a couple in the brasserie, in front of a table laid for two.

They were Justin Minard and Germaine. He almost hurried past to avoid being delayed by them. The flautist had seen him, but Maigret felt he was pretending to look the other way. Mademoiselle Gendreau’s chambermaid, on the other hand, tapped on the window-pane, and he had to go in.

“I was afraid you were on your way to call at the hotel and would miss me,” Germaine said. “Have you done a lot of work?”

There was something shamefaced about Minard, who was carefully studying the menu.

The girl, on the other hand, was radiant. Her complexion seemed to be clearer, a better colour, her eyes more sparkling, her breasts seemed to have grown bigger.

“Do you need us this afternoon? Because if you don’t, I see there’s a matinée at the Théâtre de l’Ambigu...”

They were sitting together on a bench covered with American cloth, and Maigret noticed that Germaine’s hand was resting, quietly confident, on the musician’s knee.

The two men’s eyes met at last. The flautist seemed to be saying: “There was nothing else I could do.”

And Maigret did his best not to smile.

He himself was going home to lunch with Madame Maigret, in their little dining-room on the fourth floor, where they could watch people passing along the pavement below like minute figures.

It was Madame Maigret who, while they were talking about something quite different, suddenly remarked:

“I bet she got him.”

Not that she dreamt for a moment that the girl with the big breasts might have got her husband as well.

Chapter VI

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Not until eight o’clock in the evening, when the gas-lamps were outlining the vistas of the avenues round the Arc de Triomphe, wreathing them in pearly light, did Maigret, who had almost given up hope, make contact with the object of his search.

He would keep a glowing memory of his afternoon, one of the loveliest Paris spring days, and such sweet, perfumed air that one stopped still to breathe it in. It must have been several days now that women had been going out without wraps during the warmer hours of the day, but he had only just noticed it, he felt he was witnessing a blossoming of gay dresses, and there were daisies, poppies, cornflowers in their hats, while the men were trying out their boaters.

He had done nothing for hours but tramp round a narrow area, bordered by the Étoile, the Place des Ternes and the Porte

Maillot. In the Rue Brey, as soon as he rounded the corner, he bumped into three women, perched on high heels, tightly corseted, not talking, not even standing together, but ready to rush up the moment a man appeared. Their home-port was actually the hotel where the count was living, and near the threshold there was another woman, much fatter than the others, more placid, who waited, refusing to hunt out in the open.

Why had Maigret noticed there was a laundry opposite, where fresh-faced young girls were ironing? Was it because of the contrast?

“Is the count upstairs?” he asked at the reception desk.

They examined him from top to toe. The people he was to meet today all looked him over in this way, in slow motion almost, bored rather than disdainful, and only replied with reluctance.

“Go up and see.”

He thought he had already reached his first goal.

“Can you tell me the number of his room?”

The man hesitated. He had shown that he was not one of the count’s friends.

“Thirty-two...”

He went upstairs through a smell of human bodies and cooking. At the end of the corridor a chambermaid was making a pile of sheets, which still seemed damp with sweat. He knocked in vain at the door.

“Do you want Lucile?” the servant asked from the far end.

“The count.”

“He’s not there. Nobody’s in.”

“You don’t know where I could find him?”

The question must have been so absurd that she didn’t bother to answer.

“What about Lucile?”

“Isn’t she at the Coq?”

There, he had given himself away again; they mistrusted him at once. If he didn’t even know where to find Lucile, what was he doing coming here?

The Coq was one of the two cafés on the corner of the Avenue de Wagram. The terraces were wide. There were some women sitting there alone, and Maigret suspected there was little difference between these and the ones on the prowl at the corner of the Rue Brey. There was still another kind, those who strolled slowly up to the Étoile, then came back down to the Place des Ternes, window-shopping on the way, and some of them might have been taken for middle-class housewives out for a stroll.

He was looking for a scar. He spoke to the waiter.

“Is Lucile here?”

A glance around.

“I haven’t seen her today.”

“Do you think she’ll be along? You haven’t seen the count either?”

“I haven’t served him here for the past three days.”

He reached the Rue des Acacias. The garage was still closed. The bootmaker, a quid of tobacco in his cheek, also seemed to find his questions pointless.

“I think I saw the motor go out this morning.”

“A grey one, a De Dion Bouton?”

For all the man chewing tobacco cared, a motor-car was a motor-car and he never noticed what type it was.

“You don’t know where I could find him?”

And the fellow gave him an almost pitying look, from his seat in the shade of his shop.

“I’ve got my shoes to worry about...”

He returned to the Rue Brey, went upstairs and knocked on number 32 without getting any answer. Then he continued his

hunt, from the Coq to the Place des Ternes, staring at the faces of all the women, looking for a scar, so that for an hour or more they thought he was a customer finding it hard to make up his mind..

From time to time a feeling of distress came over him. He hated wasting his time here, when probably something was happening elsewhere. If he had time, he had promised himself a stroll round the Balthazar Coffee offices, then a trip to make sure Lise Gendreau was still at the Hôtel du Louvre, and he would also have liked to watch the comings and goings in the Rue Chaptal.

Why did he persist? He saw serious-looking men, their heads lowered, go into the hotel in the Rue Brey, and they seemed to be drawn there on the end of a leash. He saw them come out again, even more pitiful, with worried looks, and hastily cross the empty space separating them from the crowds, where they eventually regained their self-confidence. He saw the women giving each other conspiratorial looks and sharing out the money.

He went into all the bars. He had the idea of copying the flautist and ordering a strawberry cordial, but it made him feel sick, and about five o'clock in the afternoon he was back to beer again.

"No, I've not seen Dédé either. Did you arrange to meet him?"

From one end of his beat to the other he came across the same sort of freemasonry. It was not till it was about seven o'clock that someone said to him:

"Wasn't he at the races?"

Nothing about Lucile either. He ended up asking the least surly-looking of the women.

"Maybe she's gone off to the country."

He did not catch on straight away.

"Does she often go to the country?"

She looked at him, laughing.

“It can happen to her, like all women, eh? Well, better get back on my beat...”

He almost gave up three or four times. He had even hesitated a moment outside a métro station, went down a few steps.

And then, just after half past seven, as he was walking along, staring at all the women going by, he chanced to glance down the quiet Rue de Presbourg. There were some cabs and a private carriage lined up alongside the pavement, and just in front of them a grey motor-car, the type and number of which he recognized immediately.

It was Dédé’s motor. Nobody was in it. A police constable was on duty on the corner of the street.

“I’m from the Saint-Georges District Station. I’d like you to do something for me. If the owner of that motor-car comes back and tries to drive away, can you detain him under some pretext or other?”

“Where’s your card?”

Even the policemen round here mistrusted him! It was the time when all the restaurants were full. Since Dédé wasn’t at the Coq—they had just assured him of that once more—he was probably having a meal somewhere. In an eating-house, which seemed fairly full, people pushed past him, calling out as they went by:

“Dédé...? Never heard of him...”

Nor had they heard of him in the brasserie near the Salle Wagram.

Maigret went back twice to make sure the car was still there. He was tempted to puncture one of the tyres with a knife as a precaution, but the presence of the constable, who was many years senior to him in the profession, prevented him.

And then he pushed open the door of a little Italian restaurant. He asked his eternal question: ”

“Have you seen the count?”

“Bob? No... Not today or yesterday either...”

“And Dédé?”

It was a small room, the seats covered in red velvet. It was quite elegant. At the end, a partition which didn't quite reach the ceiling separated the restaurant from a sort of private room, and Maigret saw a man in a check suit framed in the doorway. He had a highly-coloured complexion, and his very blond hair was parted in the middle.

“What is it?” he asked, not speaking to Maigret, but the proprietor, who was standing behind the counter.

“He wants the count or Dédé...”

The man in the check suit came forward, his mouth full, a table napkin in his hand. He came up very close to Maigret, calmly taking his time as he looked at him.

“Well?” he asked him.

And while Maigret was trying to think what to say:

“I'm Dédé.”

Maigret had considered countless ways of behaving when he finally came face to face with this man, but another occurred to him on the spur of the moment.

“I arrived yesterday,” he said awkwardly.

“Arrived from where?”

“From Lyons. I live in Lyons.”

“How very interesting!”

“I'm looking for a friend of mine, a school-friend...”

“If it's a school-friend, it's not me.”

“It's the Comte d'Anseval... Bob...”

“Well, fancy that!”

He didn't smile, but passed the top of his tongue round his teeth, reflecting.

“And where have you been looking for Bob?”

“All over the place. I couldn't find him at his hotel.”

“So when you two were at school together, he gave you the address of his hotel, eh?”

“A friend gave it to me.”

Dédé gave the barman an almost imperceptible sign.

“Well, as you’re a friend of Bob’s you must drink a glass of wine with us. We’re just having a little family party.”

He beckoned him to follow him towards the private room. The table was laid. There was a bottle of champagne in a silver bucket, some glasses, a woman in black, her elbows on the table, and a man with a broken nose, a bovine type, who stood up slowly, adopting the attitude of a boxer getting up for the next round.

“That’s Albert, one of my pals.”

And he gave Albert an indefinable look, the same sort of look he had given the proprietor. He didn’t raise his voice, still didn’t smile, and yet one got the impression that it was a great joke.

“Lucile, Bob’s girl.”

Maigret saw the scar, and a very lovely and expressive face, and as he bent down to say good evening, tears sprang from the young woman’s eyes and she wiped them away with a handkerchief.

“Don’t worry about that. She’s just lost her dad. Now she’s weeping into the champagne. Angelino! Bring another glass and set another place!”

It was eerie, disturbing, this icy, slyly menacing cordiality. Maigret looked round and had the distinct impression that any escape would be impossible without the permission of the little man in the check suit.

“So you’ve come from Lyons to look for your old friend Bob?”

“I didn’t come on purpose for that. I had some business in Paris. A friend told me Bob was here. We’ve been out of touch for a long time.”

“For a long time, eh? Well, here’s to you! Any friend of Bob’s is a friend of ours. Drink up, Lucile!”

She did what she was told, and her hand was shaking so much that the glass clinked against her teeth.

“She only got the telegram this afternoon, with the news that her father was dead. It’s likely to upset anyone. Show the telegram, Lucile.”

She looked at him, amazed.

“Show the gentleman...”

She rummaged in her bag.

“I must have left it in my room!”

“You like ravioli? The *patron*’s making a special dish for us. By the way, what’s your name?”

“Jules.”

“Nice name, Jules. It’s got a good ring to it. Well, Jules, old man, what have you got to say for yourself?”

“I’d have liked to see Bob before I went back.”

“So you’re going back to Bordeaux soon?”

“Lyons, I said. ”

“Ah, yes. Lyons! Lovely place! I’m sure Bob will be most upset if he misses you. Especially, you know, as he’s so fond of his old school-friends. Put yourself in his place. School-pals are decent chaps. I bet you’re a decent sort of person. What do you think our friend does for a living, Lucile?”

“I don’t know.”

“Guess! I bet he keeps chickens.”

Did he say that just by chance? Why ‘chickens’, a word which in certain quarters meant detectives? Should he consider it as a warning given to the others?

“I’m in the insurance business,” Maigret said, playing the part to the end; there seemed nothing else for it.

The food was served. A fresh bottle was brought in, which Dédé must have signalled for.

“It’s funny how people run into each other. You come to Paris just like that, you vaguely recall an old school-friend and then you meet somebody who gives you his address. Other people might have searched for ten years, particularly when not a soul in this neighbourhood has heard the name d’Anseval. It’s like my name. Ask the *patron*, or Angelino who’ve known me for years, what my name is, and they’ll simply say Dédé. Just Dédé! Stop blubbing, Lucile. The gentleman will think you’ve got no table manners.”

The other man, with the boxer’s nose, was saying nothing, eating, drinking, a stolid look on his face, but he occasionally gave a sort of silent laugh, as if he fully appreciated the garage-owner’s jokes.

When Lucile looked down at a little gold watch, tucked in her belt, and suspended on a guard-chain, Dédé reassured her:

“You’ll catch your train, don’t you worry.”

He explained to Maigret:

“I’m going to put her in the puffer presently, seeing she wants to get there in time for the funeral. Funny how everything happens at once. Today her old man kicks the bucket, and I back a winner at Longchamps. I’m rolling in dough. I fling a little party, and Bob’s not here to share the booze.”

“Is he away?”

“That’s it, Jules. He’s away. But later on we’ll try and let you see him, all the same.”

Lucile started sobbing again.

“Drink up, my girl! That’s the only way to drown your sorrows. Would you have guessed she was so sensitive? I’ve been doing my best to buck her up for the last two hours. All fathers have to go some time or other, don’t they? How long is it since you last saw him, Lucile?”

“Shut up!”

“Another bottle, Angelino. And what about the soufflé? Tell the *patron* not to forget the soufflé. Your health, Jules.”

Maigret drank and drank, but his glass was never empty, and Dédé had an almost menacing way of filling it up, forcing him to drink.

“What’s your friend’s name, the one who gave you the information?”

“Bertrand.”

“He must be a clever lad. He not only put you on to old Bob, but sent you to the garage.”

So he knew already that somebody had been prowling around in the Rue des Acacias and asking questions about him. He must have called in there late in the afternoon.

“Which garage?” he asked, all the same.

“I thought you said something about a garage. Wasn’t it me you asked for when you came here?”

“I knew Bob and you were friends.”

“What a sly lot they are in Lyons! Your health, Jules! Like the Russians do! In one gulp! Come on! Don’t you like it?”

The boxer seemed to be enjoying himself in the corner. Lucile, on the other hand, forgetting a little about her troubles, seemed to be getting nervous on some other count. Two or three times Maigret thought he saw her give Dédé a questioning look.

What were they going to do with him? The garage-owner, quite obviously, was up to something. He was becoming more and more playful, in his own peculiar way, not smiling, his eyes glinting oddly. Now and then he would look for approbation to the other two, like an actor who feels himself to be in good form.

“The main thing is to keep my head!” Maigret was saying to himself, as they forced him to drink glass after glass of champagne.

He was unarmed. He was strong, but he couldn't hope to hold his own against two men like the garage owner and particularly the boxer. And more and more clearly he sensed a cool determination in the two men.

Did they know he belonged to the police? It was quite likely.

Perhaps Lucile had been into the Rue Brey and they had told her of the afternoon's persistent visitor? Who knows but what they'd been waiting for him?

Still, the little party was a celebration of some sort. Dédé had announced that he was in the money, and it looked true enough: he was excited in the way those sort of people are when they suddenly find themselves with a fat wallet.

The races? He probably went often, but Maigret could have sworn that he had not set foot at Longchamps today.

As for Lucile's tears, it wasn't her father's fate which brought them to her eyes at regular intervals. Why did they start gushing every time Bob's name was mentioned?

It was ten o'clock, and they were still sitting round the table, the glasses still filled with champagne. And Maigret was continuing to battle against encroaching drunkenness.

"Do you mind if I make a telephone call, Jules?"

The telephone was in the main room, on the left, and from where he sat Maigret could watch him. Dédé had to ask for two or three numbers before he got the person he wanted. He could see his lips moving but could not make out what he was saying. Lucile seemed more and more nervous, more and more worried. As for the boxer, after lighting an enormous cigar, he smiled benignly, winking at Maigret from time to time.

Behind the window of the telephone box Dédé seemed to be giving orders, slowly, stressing certain words. There was no longer any trace of playfulness on his face.

"Sorry, old man, but I wouldn't have liked you to miss your old friend Bob."

Lucile, her nerves on edge, burst out sobbing into her handkerchief.

“You telephoned him?”

“Not quite, but it was almost the same thing. I’ve arranged things so you can both see each other again. That’s the same thing, isn’t it? You do want to meet him again, don’t you?”

He must have said something extremely funny, for the boxer was in a state of ecstasy, even uttered a sort of chorde of admiration.

Did they imagine that Maigret was not equally aware what was going on? The count was dead, or as good as dead. When Dédé talked to Maigret of re-uniting them...

“I’ve got a phone call to make, as well,” he said, as indifferently as possible.

In spite of Maxime Le Bret’s advice, he had decided to alert his station: he did not dare get in touch with the police of another district. It would be Besson on duty, or Colombani, while Sergeant Duffieu would be playing cards. He only had to stall for a while, to give them time to come and be on guard near the motor-car.

Here they would not dare try anything on him. People were still eating, their voices could be heard on the other side of the partition, and although many of them might belong to Dédé’s set, there would certainly be a few others there as well.

“Who do you want to phone?”

“My wife.”

“So your wife is with you? A family man, eh? Do you hear, Lucile? Jules is a respectable gent. No use to you! No good playing with his foot underneath the table. Your health, Jules! Waste of time getting up. Angelino will do your telephoning for you. Angelino! What hotel’s your old woman staying at?”

The waiter stood there and even he seemed to be relishing the situation.

“It’s not urgent.”

“Are you sure? She won’t be worried? Do you think she’ll be imagining all sorts of things and setting the police after you? A bottle, Angelino! No, perhaps not. Some brandy. Time for that now. In big glasses. I’m sure our friend Jules likes his cognac.”

For an instant Maigret thought of getting up quickly and rushing to the door, but he realized that they would never let him reach it. The two men were more than likely armed. They were sure to have friends, if not accomplices, in the main room, and Angelino, the waiter, would not hesitate to trip him up.

Then Maigret became calm, lucidly calm, extremely lucid, in spite of the champagne and cognac he was being obliged to drink. He too glanced at his watch from time to time. It wasn’t so long since he had done railway station policing and he knew by heart the times of the principal trains.

Dédé had not been talking to no purpose when he mentioned a train. They were really going, perhaps the three of them. They had probably bought their tickets already. So that each half hour that went by eliminated a certain number of possibilities. The Le Havre train, which could have taken them to a channel steamer, left Saint-Lazare ten minutes ago. At the Gare de l’Est, the Strasbourg train was leaving in about twenty minutes.

Dédé was not the sort to bury himself in some corner of the country where he would eventually be found. He had his car parked outside in the Rue de Presbourg.

They weren’t taking any luggage. They would doubtless abandon the car.

“Don’t drink any more, Lucile. If I know you, you’ll end up spewing all over the table cloth, and that’s not polite. The bill, Angelino!”

And pretending to think Maigret had attempted to take his notecase from his pocket:

“Not on your life! I told you this was a little family party...”

He proudly opened a notecase, bursting with thousand franc notes. Not even bothering to look at the bill, he thrust one of the notes into Angelino's hand, saying:

“Keep the change!”

He certainly felt sure of himself!

“And now, my children, let's get going. We'll drive Lucile to the station, then we'll go and find Bob. Will that suit you, Jules? Can you stand up all right? Our friend Albert will give you a hand. But of course! Hold on to his arm, Albert. I'll look after the girl friend.”

It was half past eleven. This part of the Avenue de Wagram was badly lit, the street lamps did not begin until further down near the Place des Ternes. The *patron* watched them leave, giving them a funny look, and they had not gone ten yards along the pavement before he hurriedly closed his shutters, in spite of the fact that there were still two or three people inside.

“Hold him up, Albert. Mustn't let him fall on his face, or his friend Bob won't recognize him. This way, ladies and gentlemen!”

Maigret would have called for help if there'd been a policeman on the corner, because he knew only too well what was in store for him. They had talked too much, given away too much. He realized that his lot had been decided as soon as he arrived at the Italian restaurant.

There was no policeman in sight. On the other side of the avenue he could just make out two or three girls in the gloom. At the end of the avenue, a tram was waiting at the terminus, but it was empty, a yellowy, syrupy light showing through its windows.

Maigret could still hope that his companions would not shoot. They would need time to jump into the car and get away from the neighbourhood before the alarm was given.

A knife? Probably. It was the fashion. And Albert, the boxer, had carefully put his right arm out of action, pretending to be helping him.

A pity Maigret had not been able to puncture one of the tyres a while ago. If he had waited a few minutes until the constable had turned his back, the situation would have been changed.

It was almost midnight. There were still two trains to leave, one for Belgium from the Gare du Nord and the one to Vintimille from the Gare du Lyon. But Vintimille was a long way away.

Madame Maigret must be waiting up for him, sewing; Justin would be playing the double bass in the Brasserie Clichy, where the numbers of the musical items were announced on a placard. Had he been able to get out of Germaine's clutches? Maigret would have sworn that she was there at the brasserie, and the musician would be wondering what to do with her.

There was not a soul in sight in the Rue de Presbourg, not even a cab. Only the grey motor was parked alongside the pavement, and having installed Lucile in the back of the car, Dédé climbed into the driver's seat and started the engine.

Perhaps they intended to drive him to an even more deserted spot, by the bank of the Seine or the Saint-Martin canal, where they could afterwards throw his body into the water?

Maigret had no wish to die, and yet he was almost resigned. He would do all in his power to defend himself, but there was little he could do. His left hand was clutching his bunch of keys in his pocket.

If only the engine wouldn't start! But after spluttering once or twice it began to run true, and the car quivered on its wheels.

The goatskin jacket was on the seat, but Dédé didn't bother to put it on. Would he be the one to do the deed, in cold blood? Or would it be the boxer, standing behind Maigret, still not letting go of his arm?

The moment had come and perhaps Maigret uttered a little prayer:

"Dear God, let it be..."

As if by chance there was the sudden sound of voices. Two men, pretty drunk, were walking down the Avenue de Wagram, wearing evening dress and black cloaks, their canes sticking out of their pockets, humming the refrain of a popular dance tune.

“Come on, my Jules,” Dédé said, and Maigret just had time to hear him say it.

As he was lifting his right foot to step into the car, he was hit violently on the head. Instinctively he had ducked, and that softened the blow. He thought he could hear steps approaching, voices, the back-fire of the car engine, before he lost consciousness of what was going on around him.

When he opened his eyes the first thing he saw was legs, polished shoes, then faces which looked ghostly in the shadows. It seemed to him that there were a lot of them, yet a little later he was surprised to discover there were only five people standing around him.

One of the faces belonged to a fat girl, flabby and placid, who must have been on her beat on the other side of the avenue and had been attracted by the noise. He had seen her two or three times during the afternoon, on her spot, and she’d certainly been unlucky to be still on the hunt at that hour.

The two carousers were there too, and one of them, bending over him, probably still befuddled, was doggedly asking:

“Well now, old chap, do you feel better? Tell me, old chap, are you all right?”

Why was there a basket, and why was the air full of the scent of violets? He tried to lift himself up on one elbow. The drunk helped him. He then saw an old flower girl, who was crying:

“More hooligans! If this doesn’t stop...”

And a hotel messenger, a little boy in a red uniform, was running off, shouting:

“I’ll go and get the cops!”

“Are you all right, old chap?”

Like a sleepwalker Maigret asked:

“What time is it?”

“Five past twelve.”

“I must make a phone call.”

“But of course, old chap! In a minute. We’ll bring you a telephone. We’ve just sent for one.”

His hat had fallen off, his hair was stuck to the top of his head. That scoundrel Albert must have hit him with a knuckle-duster. But for these two nightbirds they would doubtless have finished him off, and if Maigret had not ducked...

He repeated:

“I must telephone.”

He managed to get on all fours, and drops of blood were falling from the top of his head on to the pavement, while one of the two rakes was yelling: “He’s blotto, old man. Marvellous! He’s still blotto!”

“I tell you... I’ve got to...”

“Telephone... Yes, dear... You hear, Armand?... Go and find him a telephone...”

And the girl was becoming indignant:

“Can’t you see it’s sent him crackers? You’d do better to fetch a doctor.”

“Do you know one in the neighbourhood?”

“There’s one in the Rue de l’Étoile.”

But the hotel messenger was already coming back, very excitedly leading two policemen, wheeling their bicycles. The rest moved aside. The policeman bent over him.

“I must telephone,” Maigret repeated.

It was strange. He had not felt at all drunk during the evening, and it was only now that his tongue was becoming thick, his thoughts all muddled. Only one of them remained clear, and very urgent.

He was mumbling, furious at being there like that, on the ground, in that ridiculous posture, unable to get up:

“Police...Look in my pocket book... Saint-Georges District... I must telephone the Gare du Nord at once...The Brussels train... In a few minutes... They’ve got a car...”

One of the policemen had gone over to the gas-lamp to examine the contents of his pocket book.

“It’s true, Germain.”

“Listen... You must be quick... They’ve got their tickets... A woman in black, with a scar on her cheek. One of the men’s wearing a check suit... The other has a broken nose...”

“Will you go, Germain?”

The local police station was not far away, in the Rue de l’Étoile. One of the policemen straddled his bike. The young boy, who had not been listening properly, asked:

“Is he a cop?”

Maigret fell into oblivion again, as one of the rakes mumbled:

“I tell you he’s as drunk as a lord.”

Chapter VII

« ^ »

He was still trying to push them away from him with his hands, but his hands were limp, there was no strength in them. He wanted to beg them to leave him in peace. Had he not done so? He couldn't remember. He had so many things going round in his head that it was a little painful.

One definite thing stood out from all the rest: it was absolutely necessary for them to let him see it through to the end. To the end of what? Good Lord! Why was it so difficult to make some people understand. To the end!

Now they were treating him like a child, or like an invalid. They didn't care what he thought. It vexed him even more to hear them discussing his case in such loud voices, as if he were unable to understand. Just because he'd been left on the ground like an enormous squashed insect! There had been legs around him all right! Then the ambulance. He knew perfectly well it was an ambulance and had made a struggle. Can't you get hit on the head any more without being taken off to hospital?

He had also recognized the sombre gates of Beaujon, the archway and a very powerful electric light which hurt his eyes; people were quietly walking here and there, a tall young man in a white jacket seemed to be laughing at everybody.

Did they think he wasn't aware it was the resident doctor? A nurse was cutting away the hair on top of his head, and the doctor was talking some nonsense to her. She looked very pretty in her uniform. By the way they were looking at each other, they must have been making love just before Maigret was brought in.

He was not feeling sick but he vomited, because of the smell of ether.

"That'll teach him," he thought.

What were they giving him to drink? He refused to drink. He needed time to think. Hadn't the policeman on the bicycle

told them he was a detective in charge of a very important case, a *confidential* case?

Nobody believed him. It was the superintendent's fault. He didn't want to be carried. And why did Madame Maigret burst out laughing when she suddenly appeared at his bedside?

He was sure she had laughed, a nervous laugh he had not heard before; then, for a long time, he heard her going in and out of the room as quietly as possible.

Could he have acted otherwise than he had? If they would only let him think. Or give him a piece of paper and pencil. Any old scrap of paper, yes. That'll do.

Suppose this line is the Rue Chaptal... It's very short... Good... It's a little after one o'clock in the morning, and the street is empty...

Sorry: there was somebody there. Dédé was there, at the wheel of his car. Notice that Dédé had not stopped the engine. There could be two reasons for that. The first was that he had only stopped for a few minutes. The second, that he thought he might have to leave in a hurry.

Motor-cars, particularly on a cold night—and it was cold, that April night—are difficult to start.

Nobody must interrupt him! One line, then. A small square for the Balthazars' house. He said the Balthazar's house because it seemed to sound truer than the Gendreaus'. Deep down it was the Balthazar family that mattered, the Balthazar money, the Balthazar drama.

If Dédé's car was there, there was some reason why it was there. And the reason, probably, was that it had brought the count and was meant to drive him away again.

This was a very vital point. Don't interrupt... It was no use putting things on his head, or boiling water in the kitchen. He could hear water boiling quite clearly. They were spending their time boiling water, and it was annoying; after all, it stopped him thinking.

Did the count take Dédé along with him the other times he paid Lise a visit? That would be an important thing to find out.

If not, then that visit at one o'clock in the morning was a special visit, with a definite aim in view.

Why had Madame Maigret burst out laughing? What was funny about him? Did she too think that he had been playing around with girls?

It was Justin Minard who slept with Germaine. No doubt she had not let him slip out of her clutches and would probably be a millstone round his neck for a long time to come. And Carmen? He had never seen her. There were lots of people he had never seen.

It wasn't fair. When you were conducting a *confidential* case you should have the right to see everybody, to see them from the inside.

He wanted his pencil back. This square is a room. Lise's room, of course. The furniture doesn't matter. There's no point in drawing in the furniture. That would only confuse things. Only the bedside table, because there was a revolver in the drawer or on the top.

Now, all depends on this. Was Lise in bed or wasn't she? Was she expecting the count, or not? If she was in bed, she must have got the revolver out of the bedside table.

Don't press his head, for God's sake! How is it possible to think when somebody's pressing down on your head with something heavy?

How could it be daylight? Who was it? There was a man in the room, a little bald man whom he knew, but whose name he could not quite remember. Madame Maigret was whispering. Somebody slipped something cold into his mouth.

Please, gentlemen...! In a moment he would have to go and give evidence in the witness box, and if he made a mess of it, Lise Gendreau would burst out laughing and say he couldn't understand anything because he wasn't a member of the Hoche Club.

He must concentrate on the square. The little round thing is Lise, and only the women in the family took after old

Balthazar, the recluse in the Avenue du Bois. He said so himself, and he should know.

Then why did she rush to the window, pull back the curtains and call for help?

Wait a moment, Superintendent, sir... Don't forget Minard the flautist, because Minard has just changed everything...

Nobody had had time to leave the house when Minard rang the bell, and while he was arguing with Louis, a man's voice called from the staircase:

“Hurry up, Louis!”

And Dédé's car drove away again. Careful! It didn't drive away for good. It made a tour of the neighbouring houses. So Dédé was certainly waiting for someone.

When he came back, had he just driven along the street to see what was happening? Or had he stopped? Did the person he was waiting for get back into the car?

Heavens above, why wouldn't they leave him alone? He didn't want to drink any more. He had had enough. He was working. Couldn't they hear him? *He was work-ing.*

He was re-con-struct-ing!

He was hot. He was fighting back. He would not let anyone make fun of him, not even his wife. It was enough to make him cry. He actually felt like crying. What was the point of humiliating him like this? They shouldn't despise him and make fun of everything he said, just because he'd been sitting on the pavement.

He wouldn't be entrusted with any more cases. They had even hesitated about this one. If he wanted to know what was going on inside people, was it his fault if he was forced to have a drink with mem sometimes?

“Jules...”

He shook his head.

“Jules! Wake up...”

He would punish them by not opening his eyes. He clenched his teeth. He must look ferocious.

“Jules, it’s...”

And another voice said:

“Well, young Maigret?”

He forgot his promise. He sat up, abruptly, and it was as if he’d hit his head on the ceiling; he automatically put his hand to his head and discovered it was wrapped in a big bandage.

“I’m sorry, Superintendent, sir...”

“Please forgive me for waking you up.”

“I wasn’t asleep.”

His wife was there, smiling at him, and behind Monsieur Le Bret’s back was making signs at him which he failed to understand.

“What’s the time?”

“Half past ten. I learnt what had happened when I arrived at the office.”

“Have they made out a report?”

A report on him! How humiliating! He usually wrote out the reports and he knew how this one would go:

Last night at 11.45 p.m., while conducting our round along the Avenue de Wagram, we were hailed by...

Then something like:

... an individual lying on the pavement, and answering to the name of Maigret, Jules Amedée François...

The superintendent was very spruce, dressed in pearl grey from head to foot, a flower in his button-hole. His breath smelt of his morning glass of port.

“The Gare du Nord police were able to arrest them just in time.”

Heavens! He had almost forgotten those others! He felt like saying, to use the flautist’s words: “That’s of no importance.”

And it was true. Dédé wasn't the one who mattered, nor Lucile, least of all the boxer, who had hit him on the head with what the report would call "a blunt instrument".

He was feeling uneasy lying in bed in his chief's presence, and he started to get out.

"Don't move."

"I'm perfectly fit, I promise you."

"That's what the doctor says too. Nevertheless you're to have a few days' rest."

"Not on your life!"

They were trying to do him out of his case. He saw what they were up to. He wasn't going to let it happen.

"Keep calm, Maigret."

"I am calm, completely calm. And I know what I'm saying. Nothing can stop me from walking, from leaving this house."

"There's no hurry about that. I understand your eagerness, but as far as your case is concerned, everything will be done that you consider necessary."

He said, "*your* case" because he was a man of the world. He had casually lit a cigarette and was looking at Madame Maigret in some confusion.

"Don't worry. My husband smokes his pipe from morning till night, even in bed."

"Why yes, give me my pipe."

"Do you think you should?"

"Did the doctor say I wasn't to smoke?"

"He didn't mention it."

"Well then?"

She had placed everything she had found in his pockets on the dressing table and she began, filling his pipe for him, handed it to him with a match.

“I’ll leave you together,” she said, shutting herself up in her kitchen.

Maigret wanted to be able to remember everything he had thought of during the night. He could only remember vaguely, yet he was conscious of having got near the truth. Maxime Le Bret was sitting on a chair; he seemed pre-occupied. He became even more so when his secretary quietly announced between puffs on his pipe:

“The Comte d’Anseval is dead.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve no proof, but I’d swear to it.”

“Dead...How?”

“He was the one who was shot by the revolver.”

“In the Rue Chaptal?”

Maigret nodded.

“You think it was Richard Gendreau who...”

The question was too precise. Maigret had not got that far yet. He remembered his square with the little crosses.

“There was a revolver on the bedside table, or in the drawer. Lise Gendreau called for help from the window. Then somebody pulled her back. Finally a shot was fired.”

“How does Dédé come into the story?”

“He was outside in the street, at the wheel of the De Dion Bouton.”

“Has he admitted it?”

“There’s no need for him to admit it.”

“And the woman?”

“She’s the mistress of the count, commonly known as Bob. Still, you know that as well as I do.”

Maigret would have liked to be rid of the ridiculous sort of turban which was weighing his head down.

“What’s become of them?” It was his turn to ask some questions.

“They’ve been driven to the depot for the time being.”

“Why for the time being?”

“For the moment they’re only being charged with armed assault in the streets. They could probably be accused of theft.”

“Why?”

“The fellow Dédé had forty-nine thousand franc notes in his pocket.”

“He didn’t steal them.”

From the gloomy look on the superintendent’s face, he must have guessed what he was thinking.

“You mean he was given them?”

“Yes.”

“To keep quiet?”

“Yes. Dédé was not to be found anywhere all yesterday afternoon. When he came to the surface again he was glowing all over, in a hurry to spend some of the notes bulging out of his pockets. While Lucile was weeping for her dead lover, he was celebrating his new-found fortune. I was with them.”

Poor Le Bret! He couldn’t get used to the transformation in Maigret. He was just like those parents who always treat their child as a baby and then suddenly find they’ve got a young man on their hands, able to think like an adult.

Who knows? Maigret, watching him, began to have a vague suspicion. Gradually this suspicion turned to certainty.

If they had entrusted him with the case, it was in the conviction, in the hope, that he would discover nothing.

That was how it had happened. Monsieur Le Bret, of Courcelles, man of the world, didn’t in the least wish that another man of the world, a member of his club, should get

into trouble, and still less a close friend of his wife's, the Balthazar coffee heiress.

Damned flautist, sticking his nose into business that was no concern of his!

Why should something that happens in higher circles, in a private house in the Rue Chaptal, have anything to do with the newspapers, the public, let alone a jury that, for the most part, consists of little shopkeepers or bank clerks?

Le Bret, superintendent, on the other hand, could not destroy a formal statement, under his secretary's very eyes.

"You understand, young Maigret..."

Discretion. No scandal. Extreme prudence. All the better if Maigret finds out nothing. So that, in a few days'time, he could have been welcomed back with a condescending smile.

"It's nothing. Come, come. You mustn't be discouraged. You've done all you could. It's not your fault if this lunatic of a flautist thought a nightmare was the real thing. Back to your office, old chap! I promise you the next important case will be yours."

Now, of course, he was worried. Who knows but what he wished Maigret hadn't softened the blow by ducking his head in the nick of time? He would have been out of action for days, even weeks.

How in God's name could the fellow discover all he has discovered?

He coughed, and said in as unconcerned a voice as possible:

"In fact you're accusing Richard Gendreau of murder?"

"Not him, necessarily. His sister may have fired the shot. Perhaps again it was Louis. Don't forget that the flautist had to ring the bell, then knock repeatedly on the door before it was opened, and that the butler was fully dressed."

It was a ray of hope. What a let-out if it was the butler who had done the deed!

“Don’t you think the last hypothesis seems the most logical?”

He blushed, because in spite of himself, Maigret was staring at him hard. He began talking volubly.

“As far as I’m concerned that’s how I would gladly see the whole business...”

He said *gladly*—a very nice word, Maigret appreciated it, in passing.

“I don’t quite see what the count was doing in the house...”

“It wasn’t the first time.”

“So you’ve already told me, and it surprises me. He’s gone to the dogs. His father, although ruined, still preserved a certain dignity. He lived in a small flat in the Latin Quarter and carefully avoided seeing people he had known in his youth.”

“Did he work?”

“No. Not exactly.”

“How did he live?”

“As he needed money, he sold the things he had salvaged from the shipwreck: pictures, a snuff-box, a family heirloom. Some of the people who had known his father and been to the château to shoot, may have sent him a little money, on the quiet. But Bob became a sort of anarchist. He deliberately attracted attention in the most dissolute places. At one time he took a job as a porter at the Restaurant Voisin, just to embarrass friends of his family, from whom he accepted tips. He sank lower and lower, until finally he took up with Lucile and Dédé. What was I saying?”

Maigret refused to come to his aid.

“Oh, yes! Surely he must have gone to the Gendreaus’ that night with some not very reputable intention?”

“Why?”

“The fact that he took Dédé along with him and made him wait for him in the street without even stopping the engine, points to that.”

“But they were expecting him.”

“How do you know?”

“Do you think they would have let him go upstairs into a girl’s bedroom if they hadn’t? And why should Louis be fully dressed at one o’clock in the morning?”

“Granted he may have been expected, but that doesn’t mean he was welcome. He had probably given notice of his visit, in fact.”

“In the bedroom, don’t forget.”

“All right! I have to admit that Lise was indiscreet with him. We shouldn’t judge her.”

Well! Well!

“They may have had an affair. He’s still the heir to the Anseval name, and his grandparents were masters of the château bought by old Balthazar, who had merely been one of their peasants.”

“That might impress the granddaughter of a pedlar.”

“Why not? Remember that it’s quite as likely she wanted to save him from the sort of life he was leading, when she heard about it.”

Why was Maigret getting angry? He felt his whole case was being shown him in a distorting mirror. Nor did he like the superintendent’s insinuating tone of voice, as if he were teaching him a lesson.

“There’s one other possibility,” he said quietly.

“And that is?”

“That Mademoiselle Gendreau wished to add a title to her fortune. It was all very well to have acquired the Château d’Anseval. But perhaps she felt a bit like an intruder? I, too, spent my childhood in the shadow of a château, where my father was only the bailiff. I can remember the efforts made by certain nouveau-riche people to be invited to the shoot there.”

“You are insinuating that she would have wanted to marry...”

“Bob d’Anseval, why not?”

“I don’t want to discuss the matter, but it seems to me a very audacious supposition.”

“That’s not what the chambermaid thinks.”

“You’ve been questioning the chambermaid, in spite of...”

He almost said: “In spite of what I told you!”

Which would have meant: “In spite of my orders!”

He did not do so, and Maigret continued:

“You might even say I kidnapped her. She’s only a few minutes’ walk from here.”

“Did she reveal anything?”

“She knows nothing definite, only that Mademoiselle Gendreau has a bee in her bonnet about becoming a countess.”

Le Bret gave a gesture of resignation. It obviously pained him to have to surrender even a little of the dignity proper to his world.

“All right. This doesn’t alter the situation in any way. You will concede the fact that Bob might have behaved like a cad.”

“We know nothing of what happened in the bedroom except that a shot was fired.”

“You are coming to the same conclusions as I. A man behaves in the way we know he is capable of behaving. The brother of the girl is in the house, and the butler as well. She calls for help. One of them has heard, rushes upstairs, and highly indignant, seizes the revolver, which you yourself say was on the bedside table.”

Maigret at present seemed to approve of this. But he replied, quietly, pulling on his pipe, one of the best he had ever smoked:

“What would you have done in that man’s place? Suppose you still had the revolver in your hand, the barrel smoking, as they put it in the newspapers. On the floor a man lies dead, or seriously wounded.”

“On the hypothesis that he was wounded, I should have fetched a doctor.”

“They didn’t do so.”

“You conclude then that he was dead?”

Maigret was following the one idea, patiently, as though he himself was searching.

“At that moment somebody knocks on the door on the ground floor. A passer-by who heard the calls for help.”

“You must agree, young Maigret, that people don’t like having just anybody mixed up in their affairs.”

“Somebody calls out from the landing:

“ ‘Hurry up, Louis!’

“What could that mean?”

He scarcely realized he had now taken charge of the interview, that his chief was becoming more and more embarrassed as their roles, to some extent, were reversed.

“Perhaps the man was not quite dead? Or again Lise was in a hysterical state? I don’t know. I expect one is very likely to panic in such moments.”

“Louis thrust the intruder into the street with a blow of his fist full in the face.”

“It was wrong of him.”

“And nobody was in much of a panic. They obviously realized that the chap who’d been manhandled would go and give the alarm to the police, who would be sure to come and demand an explanation.”

“Which you did.”

“They only had a limited amount of time. They could have telephoned the police:

“ ‘Something’s happened. It’s not a crime, but an accident. We’ve been forced to shoot a lunatic who had been threatening us.’

“I think that’s what you would have done, Superintendent, isn’t it?”

How the situation had changed, with him here in his bedroom, in his bed, instead of in the office! Behind the baize door at the station, he would not have dared to say a quarter of what he had just said. He had an awful headache, but that was of secondary importance. In the kitchen Madame Maigret must have been horrified to hear him talking with so much self-confidence. He was even becoming aggressive.

“Well, Superintendent, they did not do that. This is what they did. First of all they carried the dead or wounded man away, God knows where. Probably to one of the rooms over the stables, since they are the only ones I was not shown.”

“This is only a supposition.”

“Based on the fact that the body was no longer there when I arrived.”

“And if Bob had left on his own two legs?”

“His friend Dédé would not have had fifty thousand francs in his pocket yesterday, and certainly would not have decided to make for Belgium, together with Lucile.”

“You may be right.”

“So, our friends in the Rue Chaptal had about half an hour to play with. It was enough for them to tidy everything up, to remove the slightest trace of what had happened. And they had an idea, which was almost a stroke of genius. The best way to reduce the flautist’s evidence to nothing, to make it seem it was only a drunkard’s imagination, was to establish the fact that the bedroom he had pointed out was unoccupied. There was another advantage to that. Perhaps Lise Gendreau did throw a tantrum, as they say, after all. Should they let me see her in bed, pretending she was asleep? Should they let me see her still up, saying she had not heard a thing? Both were risky.

“They bundled her into a maid’s bedroom, which, miraculously, was empty. Would some stupid dolt from the police station notice any difference?

“They only had to pretend she was away, that she was at the château in the Nièvre. Heard nothing! Seen nothing! A shot fired? Whereabouts?”

“The people who stroll the streets in the morning are very excitable.

“Next morning things will look different. Who will dare to accuse the Gendreau-Balthazars?”

“You’re very hard, Maigret.”

He sighed, stood up.

“But you may be right. I’m going round, here and now, to have a talk to the Sûreté Chief.”

“You think that’s necessary?”

“If there really was a murder, and you have almost convinced me...”

“Superintendent, sir!” Maigret called him, his voice soft, almost imploring.

“I’m listening.”

“Won’t you wait twenty-four hours?”

“A while ago you almost accused me of not acting soon enough.”

“I swear I can get up. Look!”

And in spite of Le Bret’s protests, Maigret jumped out of bed, a little giddy, stood up straight, somewhat embarrassed, even so, at being in his nightshirt in front of his chief. “It’s my first case.”

“And I congratulate you on the keenness with which you...”

“If you put the Sûreté on to it now, the Chief’s Squad will finish the thing off.”

“Probably. But before anything else, if Bob’s been murdered, his body must be found.”

“If he’s dead he can wait, can’t he?”

Once again the roles were being reversed, and this time the superintendent smiled and turned his head away.

Maigret, so virulent a moment ago, now looked like an overgrown baby who had been deprived of a treat, standing there in his nightshirt, with its red embroidered collar.

“I don’t need this thing on my head.”

He tried to tear his bandage off.

“I can go out and finish the case by myself. Only give me permission to go and question Dédé and Lucile, especially Lucile. What have they said?”

“When the duty chief-inspector at the depot interrogated him this morning he asked:

“ ‘Is Jules dead?’

“I suppose he meant you.”

“If I haven’t succeeded by this time tomorrow, you can put the whole thing in the hands of the Sûreté.”

Madame Maigret had half-opened the door, in alarm, and was standing on guard, her eyes riveted on her husband who had got out of bed.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. She walked through the room to go and open the door and whispering could be heard on the landing.

She came back alone, and Maigret asked:

“Who is it?”

She gave him a look which he failed to understand, and when he insisted, she said reluctantly:

“The musician.”

“I’m just going,” Le Bret said. “It wouldn’t be fair to refuse what you just asked me.”

“Excuse me, Superintendent. I would still like... In the circumstances, and it’s what the Sûreté would do, would you let me go and see Mademoiselle Gendreau, if it’s necessary?”

“I trust you’ll be tactful about it? But be careful all the same.”

Maigret was radiant. He heard the door close, then, as he was searching for his trousers, Justin Minard came into the room, followed by Madame Maigret. The musician looked sad, worried.

“Have you been hurt?”

“Not really.”

“I’ve bad news for you.”

“Tell me.”

“She’s cleared out.”

The flautist looked so funny that Maigret almost burst out laughing.

“When?”

“Yesterday evening, or rather last night. She insisted on coming to the Brasserie Clichy with me, saying that she was mad about music and wanted to hear me play.”

Madame Maigret’s presence made it more difficult for him to talk and, realizing it, she disappeared into her kitchen once more.

“She sat just where you did when you came to see me. I was feeling very embarrassed. And as I hadn’t been home to dinner, nor set foot inside the house all day, I expected my wife to come bursting in any moment.”

“And did she?”

“Yes.”

“They had a row?”

“It happened to be between two items. I was sitting at the table. My wife started by tearing off Germaine’s hat, then she grabbed hold of her hair.”

“Were they thrown out?”

“Both of them. I went back onto the platform. The band was playing to try and distract attention. Just what they do when

there's a shipwreck, you know. You could hear them fighting outside. When the music ended, the boss came and found me and told me to go and look after my harem, as he put it."

"Were they waiting for you outside?"

"Only one of them. My wife. She made me go home. She locked up my shoes so that I couldn't go out. I went out, all the same, an hour ago, and borrowed the shoes from the concierge. Germaine's left the hotel. She went and collected her bag."

He concluded:

"What are we going to do now?"

Chapter VIII

« ^ »

At least put on your warm overcoat, just to please me,”
Madame Maigret had insisted.

He had two overcoats in those days: a heavy black one with a velvet collar, which he had been wearing for three years, and a mackintosh, very short, which he had recently bought, the sort he had wanted since he was a young boy.

He suspected his wife of having whispered in Minard’s ear as they were both leaving the flat: “Above all, don’t let him out of your sight!”

Although she laughed at him a little, she was very fond of the flautist: she thought him so gentle, so polite, so “unobtrusive”. Light, spongy clouds, of a beautiful pale grey, were spreading across the sky, and it was going to rain for the first time in ten days, pelting down, long hatchings of warm rain, which would make Maigret quite damp under his overcoat, and leave him smelling like a wet animal.

He carried his bowler in his hand, since he couldn’t put it on while his head was still wrapped in the enormous bandage. Minard went with him to the doctor’s, in the Boulevard Voltaire, where Maigret managed to have a more discreet bandage put on.

“Is it really necessary for you to go into town?”

The doctor gave him a little box containing some pills with yellow powder on them.

“In case you should feel groggy.”

“How many can I take?”

“Four or five between now and tonight. No more. But I’d rather you were in bed.”

Maigret was at something of a loss to know what to do with the musician and yet he was reluctant to upset him by sending him home now that he no longer needed him.

Making him think it was a very important assignment, he sent him to the Rue Chaptal.

“Opposite, or just about opposite the house you know, there’s a little restaurant called the Vieux Calvados. I’d like you to settle down there and watch what’s going on at the Gendreaus’.”

“And what if you shouldn’t feel well?”

“I shan’t be on my own.”

Minard did not leave him until they reached the gate of the depot, in the Quai de l’Horloge. At that time Maigret was still full of self-confidence. Even up to the smell of the dark archway, which he sniffed with pleasure. Everything was dirty, sordid. This was the place where every night the constables brought in all the suspicious characters they had collected on the streets and where the Black Marias emptied the rag-bag they had gathered during the course of raids.

He went into the guard-room which smelt like a barracks, asked if the chief-inspector would see him. They seemed to look at him rather oddly. He had this feeling from the start. He realized that the people here thought little or nothing of a mere district-station secretary.

“Take a seat.”

Three policemen were there, one of them writing, while the other two did nothing. The chief-inspector’s office was next door, but no one went to notify him; nobody was bothering about Maigret; he was being treated as if he wasn’t in the same profession. It embarrassed him so much that he even hesitated to light his pipe.

After a quarter of an hour, he ventured a question:

“Isn’t the chief-inspector in?”

“Engaged.”

“Where are the people you brought in last night?”

He had not seen anybody as he had come through, in the large room where the birds were usually penned.

“Upstairs.”

He didn't dare ask permission to go up. Upstairs was the Identification Records room. The men were all lined up, as at school. They were stripped, standing one behind the other. They were examined one by one, so that their tattooings and the slightest distinctive marks on their bodies could be noted down, after which, with their clothes on again, they went through to be measured, then to be photographed, finally to have their fingerprints taken.

Was Dédé still cock of the walk, in the line up of tramps and beggars?

In time to come, when he was in the Chief's Squad himself, Maigret would be entitled to go anywhere he liked in the building.

As for the women, a doctor would be examining them in another room, and those who were found to be diseased were sent off to the Saint-Lazare infirmary.

“Are you sure the chief-inspector's still engaged?”

He had been waiting for more than half an hour. He thought the three men were exchanging amused glances.

“We've got to wait for him to ring through.”

“But he doesn't know I'm here. I'm on an important job. He must be told.”

“You're from the Saint-Georges district, aren't you?”

And one of the policemen, the one who was writing, gave a quick glance at a piece of paper on his desk.

“Jules Maigret?”

“Yes.”

“Have to wait, old man. I can't do anything about it.”

He couldn't hear the slightest sound in the next room, where the chief-inspector was supposed to be. After he had waited patiently for at least an hour, the chief-inspector entered, not from his office, but from outside.

“Are you Le Bret’s secretary?”

At last they were taking some notice of him, instead of leaving him sitting at the end of the bench, like someone merely wanting to lodge a complaint.

“Looks as if you’ve been hurt?”

“It’s nothing much. I’d like...”

“I know. You’re here to question that chap Dédé. I think he’s downstairs again. Will you go and make sure, Gérard? If he’s there, bring him into my office.”

And to Maigret:

“Please come in. I’ll let you use my office for a while.”

“I must question the woman, as well.”

“That’s all right. Just tell the sergeant to fetch her.”

Was there really something not quite natural in all this? Maigret had thought that things would have happened differently, but he was not yet worried. He didn’t know the habits of the building and he was overawed.

A detective escorted Dédé in, then went out, followed by the chief-inspector, and the door was closed.

“Well, Jules?”

The garage owner from the Rue des Acacias was wearing the same suit as on the previous day. In accordance with the regulations they had simply removed his tie and shoe laces, which gave him a slightly untidy look. Maigret was sitting at the chief-inspector’s desk, a little uncertain of himself.

“I’m glad you weren’t too badly hurt,” Dédé said. “You ask these gentlemen here; the first thing I did when I arrived was to ask how you were.”

“You knew who I was, didn’t you?”

“ ’Course I did.”

“And,” Maigret said simply, “I knew you knew.”

“So you had an idea you might get beaten up? And what if you’d been done in properly?”

“Sit down, Dédé.”

“Good. I’m glad you’ve no hard feelings.”

Maigret might not yet be used to the place, but at least he was aware that there was no strict formality in the building.

“I know quite a lot more, and I think we’ll get on all right.”

“You surprise me.”

“The count is dead.”

“You don’t say?”

“On the night of the 15th of April, you drove the count in your motor-car to the Rue Chaptal and waited for him, leaving the engine running.”

“I don’t remember.”

“A window was opened, a woman screamed and a shot was fired. Then you drove off in the direction of the Rue Fontaine. You went round the block. You stopped for quite a while in the Rue Victor-Masse, then you went down the Rue Chaptal once again to see if Bob had come out.”

Dédé was watching him, smiling happily.

“Go on,” he said. “I suppose you haven’t got a cigarette? Those bastards have pinched everything I had in my pockets.”

“I only smoke a pipe. You knew what the count was doing in the house.”

“Keep talking.”

“You realized something had gone wrong. The next day you saw nothing in the papers. The count didn’t come back. The day after that, still nothing.”

“Very interesting.”

“You went prowling round the street again. Then, guessing what had happened, you went to look for Richard Gendreau. At his office, not at home.”

“And what did I tell that gentleman?”

“That, for a certain consideration, say fifty thousand francs, you would keep your mouth shut. Because knowing what Bob had gone to the Rue Chaptal for, you knew why he was killed.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s all.”

“And what do you suggest I do?”

“Nothing. Just talk.”

“What do you want me to say?”

“The count knew the Gendreaus. He’d been to see the girl several times. Was he her lover?”

“Did you ever see him?”

“No.”

“If you’d seen him, you wouldn’t have asked me that question. He wasn’t the boy to let any opportunity slip.”

“There was some talk of marriage, wasn’t there?”

“You know, I feel a bit sorry for you. Just what I was saying to Lucile: pity he’s been such a fool! Fancy joining the cops, a big, spunky chap like him!”

“So you’d rather go to gaol?”

“Rather than what?”

“If you talk they’ll probably forget that you blackmailed Richard Gendreau.”

“You imagine he’ll bring a charge?”

“They’ll also forget about the attempted murder, of which I was almost the victim.”

“Listen, Jules. The odds are against you. Save your breath; it worries me. You’re a good lad. One day we might run into each other and we’ll down a drink together. But here, they’re not giving you a fair chance. You’re just a choir-boy. They’ll push you around as they please.”

“Who will?”

“Never mind! Let me just tell you one thing: Bob was a smart lad. He had his own ideas about running his life. There were some types he couldn’t stomach at any price. But he wasn’t the sort to do anything dirty. Get that into your head.”

“He’s dead.”

“He may be. I don’t know about that. Or, if I do know anything that’s my own affair. Now I’ll give you a bit of friendly advice: drop it!

“You follow me? Drop it, Jules! I’ve nothing to say and I shan’t say anything. You’d do better to keep away from this lot. It’s too big for either of us.

“I know nothing, I’ve seen nothing, heard nothing. The fifty thousand smackers? I’ll go on repeating as long as I have to that I won them at Longchamps.

“As for getting out of here, we’ll wait and see, shall we?”

He wore an odd little smile as he said this.

“Now if you’ll do me a good turn, don’t upset poor Lucile too much. She was really in love with her Bob. You understand that? She may walk the streets, but she can still love her man. Don’t torment her, and I’ll probably repay you for it some day. That’s all.”

He got up and, without waiting, walked to the door.

“Dédé!” Maigret called, standing up as well.

“Enough said! My mouth is shut. You won’t get another word out of me.”

And Dédé opened the door, called the detectives.

“We’ve finished,” he said, smiling cockily.

And the sergeant asked Maigret:

“Shall I bring the woman in?”

She wouldn’t sit down, but stood stiffly in front of the desk.

“You know how Bob died?”

She sighed:

“I don’t know anything.”

“He was murdered in a house in the Rue Chaptal.”

“You think so?”

“He was a young girl’s lover.”

“I’m not a jealous person.”

“Why won’t you talk?”

“Because I’ve nothing to say.”

“If you’d known Bob was alive you wouldn’t have been going off to Belgium.”

She didn’t reply.

“Why don’t you want Bob to be avenged?”

She bit her lip and turned her head away.

“You’d rather have a few bank notes than see his murderer brought to justice?”

“You’ve no right to say that!”

“Then talk.”

“I don’t know anything.”

“Who have you seen since you came here?”

For he understood at last. When they had made him wait, it was not because the chief-inspector had been engaged. The staff in the Identification Section, upstairs, had been in touch with the Quai des Orfèvres.

Was it only Dédé who had been through the identification parade? Had Lucile had to submit to the medical inspection? It was unlikely.

But it was practically certain that someone had been questioning them, somebody from the Sûreté.

Le Bret had left the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir at least half an hour before Maigret had arrived.

It was hard to believe, and yet Dédé himself had let Maigret think that they had played him false.

He left the room and thought he caught them smiling. As if by chance, the duty chief-inspector came back just at that moment.

“Well, old chap? Success? Did they talk?”

“What are you going to do with them?”

“I don’t know yet. I’m waiting for orders.”

“From whom?”

“From upstairs, as usual.”

“Thank you.”

When he was on the quayside again, just as it began to pelt with rain, Maigret felt so disheartened that at the drop of a hat he would have sent in his resignation to the superintendent.

“You’re only a choir-boy,” the garage keeper had told him, as if he rather pitied him.

He was leaving this building, where he had so much longed to work, hanging his head, and with a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He went into the Brasserie Dauphine, where there were always a few detectives from the Quai des Orfèvres having a drink. He knew them by sight, but so far as they were concerned he might not have existed.

First of all he took one of the pills the doctor had given him, hoping it might restore him, then swallowed a large glass of spirits.

He watched them sitting round a table, thoroughly at ease, rather untidy; they could go wherever they liked, they knew everything that was going on, they swapped information about cases in hand.

Did Maigret still want to belong to the “Building”? Wasn’t he finding out that his ideas about the force were wrong?

After the second glass, he was on the point of going to see his “protector”, the big chief, Xavier Guichard, and getting everything off his chest.

They had tricked him. In his bedroom, Le Bret had pumped him for information. His carriage had been waiting outside. He had doubtless had himself driven to the Quai des Orfèvres, and they wouldn't have made him wait.

"My secretary's being fanatical. He's going to put his foot in it, and give us all a lot of trouble."

Who knows but he hadn't approached somebody higher up, the Prefect of Police, for example, or even the Minister of the Interior?

The Minister of the Interior, come to think of it, might also be an invited guest at the Rue Chaptal!

The only reason Maigret had been put in charge of the case—and told to be so very prudent!—was, he felt sure of it now, that they thought he would get nowhere.

"You want to question Dédé? Why not? Go ahead, old chap."

Only, the garage owner had been briefed beforehand. God knows what they had promised him if he would keep his mouth shut. It would not have been difficult. It wasn't his first offence. As for Lucile, if she wouldn't keep quiet, they could have shoved her in the Saint-Lazare hospital for a good while.

"You're just a choir-boy."

He gave a bitter smile, for once, in his village, he really had been a choir-boy.

Everything was being dirtied; *his* police force was being dirtied. He was not angry because they had done him out of his small success. It went deeper than that; it was more like the disappointment of a lover.

"Waiter!"

He almost had a third glass, changed his mind, paid the bill, went out, feeling that the four others at their table were looking at him ironically.

He realized that from now on his pitch would be queered. What could he do? Go and find the flautist. This was the only

trump card he had left in his hand: a flautist! And Le Bret had had inquiries made about Justin Minard the very first day.

It wouldn't matter if he, Maigret, cut up rough, they could probably claim that the blow on the head had made him peculiar.

He leapt on a passing bus and stood on the platform, scowling, breathing the wet dog smell from his overcoat. He was hot. Perhaps he was a little feverish?

In the Rue Chaptal, he almost turned back at the thought of Paumelle, the landlord of the Vieux Calvados, who had also treated him rather patronizingly.

Perhaps it was they who were right after all? Maybe, after all, he had made a mistake and was not cut out to be a policeman?

Nevertheless he knew exactly what he would have done if his hands had not been tied! In that house he could now see from the pavement, he would have become familiar with the smallest nook, would have got to know every occupant, and they would have had no secrets from him, starting from old Balthazar, who was dead, and finishing up with Lise Gendreau or Louis.

What exactly had happened on the night of the 15th was not what mattered most, since it was only the end of a chain of events. Once he knew everyone's thoughts, it would have been easy to reconstruct their movements.

That house, however, like the one in the Avenue du Bois, was a fortress whose gates were closed to him. At the slightest alarm, people rushed to the rescue from every side. Dédé, all of a sudden, became tongue-tied, and Lucile resisted the desire to avenge her Bob.

He found he was talking to himself as he walked, and shrugging his shoulders, he roughly pushed open the door of the little restaurant.

Justin was there, standing in front of the bar, a glass in his hand. He had succeeded Maigret in the tête-à-tête with Paumelle who showed no surprise on seeing the new arrival.

“The usual,” Maigret said.

The main gate stood wide open. The downpour was ending and the sun was shining through the raindrops. The roadway was glistening; it seemed it would dry in no time.

“I guessed you’d be coming back,” the landlord said. “What surprises me is that you’re not there with those other gentlemen.”

Maigret turned quickly to Justin Minard, who appeared to hesitate and then said:

“There are lots of people in the house. They arrived about half an hour ago.”

There were no carriages to be seen in the street. Presumably the visitors had come by cab?

“Who are they?”

“I don’t know them; it looked to me like a call from the Parquet. There’s a gentleman with a white beard, accompanied by a young clerk. The public prosecutor and his assistant, perhaps?”

Gripping his glass in his clenched fingers, Maigret asked:

“Who else?”

“People I’ve never seen before.”

Tactfully, Minard didn’t say what he was thinking, and it was Paumelle who grunted:

“Some of your colleagues. Not from the local station. From the Quai. I recognized one of them.”

Poor Minard! He didn’t know where to look. Indeed it rather seemed as if Maigret had played him false, as well. Maigret had led him to believe that he was in charge of the case, and the flautist had done everything he could to help him.

And now Maigret was so unimportant, they were not keeping him abreast of what was happening.

Once more he almost left to go home, to furiously write out his letter of resignation, and then retire to bed. His head was burning and stabbing painfully. The landlord was holding a bottle of calvados poised, and he nodded his head.

What did it matter? They had him all along the line. They were right. He was a choir-boy.

“Germaine’s inside,” Minard said, gently. “I caught a glimpse of her at the window.”

Of course! She, too; it was quite natural. She might not be very intelligent, but she had intuition, like all women. She had realized that she was on the wrong side, that Maigret and his flautist were mere puppets.

“I’m going in,” he decided suddenly, placing his glass on the counter.

He was so scared of losing courage, that he was in a hurry to get across the street. When he was in the porchway, he saw two men digging in a corner of the garden. On the left, outside the door leading into the hall, stood an inspector on duty.

“I’m from the local station,” he said.

“You’ll have to wait.”

“Wait for what?”

“Till these gentlemen have finished.”

“But I’m conducting the case.”

“That may be. I’ve got my orders, old man.”

Another of these Quai des Orfèvres types!

“If I ever belong to Headquarters,” Maigret promised himself, already forgetting his firm resolve to leave the force, “I swear I’ll never show I look down on the poor blokes in the local stations.”

“The public prosecutor?”

“All those gentlemen.”

“Is my superintendent there?”

“I don’t know him. What’s he like?”

“In a grey frock-coat. Tall and thin, with a smart, fair moustache.”

“Not seen him.”

“Who’s come from the Quai?”

“Chief-Inspector Barodet.”

This name was probably seen in the papers more often than any other. In Maigret’s eyes, he was almost the most wonderful man in the world, with his smooth-shaven face that made him look like a butler, his little prying eyes that always seemed to be looking somewhere else.

“What are they hunting for in the garden?”

“The body.”

The policeman was loath to answer questions, he was only doing so as a favour.

“Is Monsieur Gendreau in the house?”

“What’s he like?”

“Dark with a crooked nose.”

“He’s there.”

So, either Gendreau had not gone to his office as usual, or he had returned home in a hurry.

Just at that moment a cab stopped in the street. A young woman climbed out and hurried to the doorway where the two men were talking.

She could not have seen Maigret.

“Mademoiselle Gendreau,” she whispered.

And the inspector quickly opened the door for her, and said confidentially to his colleague:

“I’ve had orders.”

“Were they waiting for her?”

“I was only told to let her in.”

“Did you see the butler?”

“He’s the one with the gentlemen at the moment. Do you know what it’s all about?”

“A bit,” Maigret answered, swallowing down his humiliation.

“It seems he’s a nasty type.”

“Who?”

“The one who got himself done in by the servant.”

Maigret stared at him, his mouth agape.

“Are you sure?”

“About what?”

“That Louis...”

“Look here, I don’t even know who Louis is. I’ve only overheard snatches of conversation. All I know is that we’ve got to avoid attracting a crowd.”

One of the men who had been digging, certainly a member of the force, came in under the porch; the other one, who stayed in the garden, must have been the valet. The former had mud on his hands, mud on his shoes, and his face wore an expression of disgust.

“He’s not a pretty sight,” he said, as he went past them.

They opened the door for him, and he disappeared into the house. The short while the door was left ajar enabled Maigret to catch a glimpse of Lise Gendreau and her brother who were standing talking in the hall. The others, the public prosecutor’s party, must have been in one of the drawing-rooms with the door closed.

“Have you an appointment?” the policeman asked Maigret, who was making no secret of his impatience.

“I don’t know.”

His eyes were moist. Never before in his life had he felt so humiliated.

“I think it’s the press they’re scared of mostly. That’s why they’re taking so many precautions. The silly thing is that we

drink Balthazar coffee at home. I never guessed that one day..."

They must have been doing a great deal of telephoning inside, for a click or a ring could often be heard.

"If it's your superintendent who's sent you, I can go and tell them you're waiting."

"It's not worth it."

The man shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't follow any more; he saw Maigret swallow a pill.

"Not feeling well?"

"You don't know how all this started?"

"How what started?"

"You were at the Quai des Orfèvres?"

"Yes. I was getting ready to keep an eye on a character in the La Villette area. Chief-Inspector Barodet was grilling a bloke."

"A little fellow, in a check suit?"

"Yes. A cocky type."

"Did the chief-inspector get a phone call?"

"No. It was the big chief who sent for him. Meantime, I had to keep an eye on the lad. Funny chap. He asked me for a cigarette, but I hadn't got any."

"What next?"

"When Monsieur Barodet came back, he shut himself up again for a moment with the fellow in the check suit, after telling us to stay at hand."

"Who?"

"His squad. Three of us have come, besides the chief-inspector. The other two are inside. The one who was digging is Barrère, who got a bullet in his hide a month ago when he arrested the Pole in the Rue Gaulaincourt."

Every word was having its effect. Maigret could picture the inspector's duty room, the authoritative friendliness of Barodet who called them all: *My children*.

Why had they done this to him? Had he blundered? Hadn't he known how to go about it? Hadn't he been as discreet as possible?

When he had left him, in the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, Superintendent Le Bret seemed to have given him carte blanche. And Le Bret had dashed off to the Quai des Orfèvres! Then, no doubt, he'd come here?

"So the butler has confessed, after all?"

"That's what I understood. Anyhow, he's got a nasty face."

"I don't understand any more."

"What right have you to understand?"

It was probably the first real lesson in modesty Maigret had received. The inspector was older than he. He was in his thirties. He had the calm look, the kind of indifference of those who have been about a good deal. He was smoking his pipe in short puffs, not bothering to try to hear what was being said indoors.

"It's still better than watching a house in some La Villette alley-way for God knows how long."

A motor-car, this time, was drawing up beside the pavement. A young doctor with a dark beard stepped briskly down from it, a Gladstone bag in his hand, and from photographs that had appeared in newspapers, Maigret was able to recognize him. It was Dr. Paul, the police doctor, already quite famous.

"Where are the gentlemen?"

"This way, doctor. The stiff's in the garden, but I suppose you'd like to see the public prosecutor first?"

Everybody was going through into the holy of holies, save Maigret, condemned to champ the bit under the covered way.

“You’ll see,” the other man was saying, “this’ll run to just three lines in the papers.”

“Why?”

“That’s the way it is!” And that evening, true enough, *La Presse* read:

During the night of the 15th a burglar broke into the town house of the Gendreau-Balthazar family in the Rue Chaptal. Louis Viaud the butler, 56, born at Anseval, Nièvre, killed him with a bullet in the chest.

By then, Maigret was in bed with a temperature of 101°, and Madame couldn’t think how to get rid of the flautist who would not leave the room and looked more like a lost dog than ever.

Chapter IX

« ^

It lasted for three days. At first he had hoped that he would be really ill and that would make *them* furious. But all he’d found he had, on cautiously opening his eyes the first morning, was a bad cold in the head.

So he had shammed. Even in the sight of his wife it was ridiculous to have only a cold in the head, and he grizzled, coughed, complained of pains in his chest.

“I’ll make you a mustard plaster, Jules. That’ll stop you getting bronchitis.”

She was as sprightly as ever. She took care of him tenderly. You might almost say that she was pampering him. Nonetheless he got the impression that she was not taken in.

“Come in, Monsieur Minard,” she could be heard saying in the lobby. “No, he’s no worse. But I must beg you not to tire him.”

That meant that she was entering into the spirit of it.

“Has he a temperature?” the flautist asked, anxiously.

“Not enough to worry about.”

And she carefully did not mention what it was exactly, since he was, if anything, below normal, rather than above.

She loved preparing infusions, poultices, making broths and custards. She equally enjoyed carefully drawing the curtains and walking on tiptoe, sometimes half-opening the door to make sure he was sleeping.

Poor Minard, who had already become unwanted! Maigret blamed himself. He liked him a lot. He would have been delighted to do him a good turn.

He would arrive at nine or ten in the morning; he didn't ring the bell, but tapped at the door, discreetly, in case Maigret should be asleep. Then he would whisper a few words, creep into the room, brushing the door-post, approach the bed.

"No, don't move. I've just called to see how you are. Is there anything I can do for you? I'd be so glad to be able to do something useful."

It was no longer a question of playing detectives. Anything useful. He offered his services to Madame Maigret too.

"Wouldn't you let me go and do the shopping? I'm very good at it, you know."

In the end he would sit down by the window, on one buttock, just for a moment, and would stay for hours. If they asked him for news of his wife, he would promptly answer:

"It's of no importance."

He would return at the end of the afternoon, in his black tie, on his way to work, for he now played at a dance-hall in the Boulevard Saint-Michel. He was no longer playing the double-bass, but the cornet, which must have been hard for him. It left him with a pink circle in the middle of his mouth.

Every morning, also, Le Bret sent for news by a messenger from the police station. That had disappointed the concierge. She knew indeed that her tenant was in the civil service, but he had never admitted that he was a member of the police force.

"The superintendent asks me to tell you to get better soon, and not to worry. All's going well."

He snuggled down in his damp bed, smelling strongly of sweat. It was a kind of withdrawing into himself. He didn't yet know that it would become a regular habit, that he would often have recourse to this procedure in times of discouragement or trouble.

Almost to order, everything would become disconnected as a result. Instead of his ideas becoming precise, they grew confused, as in a state of fever. He would slide gently into half-sleep, and reality took on new shapes, mingled with memories of childhood; the lights and shades of the room also played their part, including the flowers on the wall-paper, even the smells from the kitchen and Madame Maigret's hushed footsteps.

He would always start again at the same point, picking up his characters like pawns, old Balthazar, the Gendreaus, the father, Lise and Richard, the Château d'Anseval, Louis, Germaine, the little maid Marie.

He made them come and go, distorted them. Then came the turn of Le Bret leaving the flat in the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, climbing into his carriage, directing his coachman: "Quai des Orfèvres."

Were he and the big chief, Xavier Guichard, old friends? This was where it all became distressing. What did Le Bret say to him in that vast office, which Maigret had twice been into, and which impressed him more than any other place in the world?

"My secretary, that young man you recommended to me, is engaged on a case. I couldn't help letting him handle it. I think he's going to put his foot into it."

Was that what he said? It was possible. Le Bret was above all things a man of the world. He went to fence every morning at the Hoche Club, was invited to salons, attended all first nights and was to be seen regularly at the paddock in his pale grey top-hat.

But Xavier Guichard? He was a friend of Maigret's father and came from their sort of people. He didn't live in the Plaine Monceau, but in a little flat in the Latin Quarter, spending

more time amongst old books than with the lovely ladies of the town.

No, he would never be capable of a dirty trick, nor a compromise! All the same he had sent for Barodet. What orders had he given him? And if that was how things stood, wasn't it because Maigret had gone wrong? Granted, he hadn't concluded his case. He didn't know who had shot the count. No more did he know why. But he would have got there in the end.

He felt conscious of having done a good job, in a short time. The proof of it was that his superintendent had become alarmed.

Well, why?

The newspapers had already ceased to mention the affair. It had been hushed up. They had doubtless taken Bob's body to the morgue for the post-mortem.

He saw himself again in the courtyard in the Rue Chaptal, standing behind the others, behind those fellows who had paid no attention to him. Barodet, who did not know him personally, must have taken him for a member of the household. The public prosecutor, the examining magistrate, the clerk, all thought he was one of Barodet's men.

Only Louis had cast him a mocking glance. No doubt he had been informed, by Germaine, of his activities.

The whole thing was humiliating, discouraging. There were moments when, with his eyes closed, his body damp, he would construct his plan of the ideal case.

"Next time, I'll do this and I'll do that..."

Then, abruptly, on the fourth morning, he had had enough of being ill, and before the arrival of the flautist, he got up, washed himself lavishly, shaved with care, and rid himself of the bandage in which his head had been kept wrapped.

He felt he wanted to get back to the smell of the police station, his black desk, the shabby customers on their bench, against the white-painted wall.

“What should I tell Justin?”

They now called him Justin, like a friend of the family, like a distant relative.

“If he cares to come and collect me at one o’clock, we’ll have lunch together.”

He had not been wearing his moustache-fixers in bed and he had to reset their points with hot tongs. He went most of the way on foot, in order to breathe again the atmosphere of the boulevards, and his ill-temper vanished in the spring morning.

“What’s the good of worrying about those people?”

The Gendreaus within their fortress. The old man’s character that was handed down through the female line. All that business about their will. The question of knowing who should inherit Balthazar Coffee...

For he realized that it was not merely a question of money. Above a certain level of wealth, it isn’t money that matters but power.

The main issue was to decide who would hold the controlling shares, who would preside over the board of directors. Lise? Richard?

It must have been something deeply rooted in their flesh that made a girl forget that she was twenty-one and dream only of a managing director’s office, as her mother had done before her.

To be the big boss, although a woman!

“Let them sort it out themselves!”

Precisely! It was just what they had done. And a man had died in the process, whom admittedly nobody mourned, unless it was a girl who walked the pavement in the Avenue de Wagram.

He entered the police station, shook hands with his colleagues.

“Bertrand’s gone to your house to see how you are.”

He didn't let the superintendent know that he was about again, sat down in his place, without saying a word, and it was not until half past ten that Le Bret, half opening the padded door, noticed him:

"You're here, Maigret? Come in and see me, then."

He tried to seem free and easy.

"Sit down, do. I'm wondering if you're right to have come back to work so quickly. I intended to suggest you had some convalescent leave. Don't you think a few days in the country would do you good?"

"I feel perfectly fit."

"Right-oh! So much the better! By the way, as you may have seen, all that spot of bother has been settled. I congratulate you, moreover, since you weren't far short of the truth. The very day I came to your flat, Louis telephoned the police."

"Off his own bat?"

"I admit to you I don't know anything about it. Either way, it doesn't matter much. The important thing is that he's confessed. He must have got wind of your inquiries, realized that you'd arrive at the truth in the end."

Maigret was staring hard at the desk, and his face showed no feeling whatever. Disconcerted, the superintendent continued:

"He went over our heads and approached the Préfecture direct. Did you read the papers?"

"Yes."

"Obviously the facts have been slightly contrived. You'll understand one day that it has to be so. There are cases when scandal serves no useful purpose, when the blunt facts could do more harm than good. Look at it this way. We both of us know that the count didn't enter the house as a burglar. Maybe he was expected? Lise Gendreau did him all sorts of favours. I use the word in its best sense.

“Remember that she was born in the Château d’Anseval, that there are ties between that family and hers.

“Bob was a good-for-nothing. He was sinking to lower and lower depths, in a frantic way. Why should she not have tried to set him back on the straight and narrow?

“That’s my wife’s opinion and she knows her well.

“Not that it matters. Perhaps he was drunk that night, as he often was? Perhaps his behaviour was scandalous?

“Louis is pretty close about the details. He was roused by the shouting. When he went into the room, Bob and Richard Gendreau were fighting, and he thought he saw a knife glint in the count’s hand.”

“Has the knife been found?” Maigret asked quietly, without taking his eyes off the desk.

He appeared to be staring obstinately at a small stain on the mahogany surface.

“I don’t know. Barodet conducted the investigation. The fact remains that there was a revolver on the bedside-table and Louis, fearing for his master’s life, fired.

“Now, my young friend, tell me what good a scandal would have done to anyone? The public would not have accepted the truth. We live in days when certain sections of society get too much attention as it is. Mademoiselle Gendreau’s honour was at stake, since her honour could have been held responsible for it all.

“Anyway, this is simply a case of legitimate defence.”

“You’re sure it was the butler who fired the shot?”

“We have his own confession. Consider, Maigret. Ask yourself what would have been the reactions of certain sections of the press and the consequences of this affair for a girl whom we can’t accuse of anything but indiscretion.”

“I see.”

“Mademoiselle Gendreau has left for Switzerland, since her nerves have sustained a great shock, and she’ll doubtless rest

for a few months. Louis has been released and will seemingly be discharged. His only fault was to lose his head and go and bury the body in the garden instead of admitting to everything immediately.”

“He buried it all by himself?”

“Put yourself in Richard Gendreau’s shoes. I can see you don’t yet understand, but you will in due course. There are cases where we aren’t entitled to...”

And, as he was searching for words, Maigret raised his head to remark in a neutral, almost ingenuous tone of voice:

“To follow our own consciences...”

Then, abruptly, Le Bret grew curt and aloof again, more aloof than he had ever been.

“My own has nothing to reproach me with,” he cut in, “and I’m prepared to state that it’s as ticklish as anyone’s. You’re young, Maigret, very young, that’s the only reason why I can excuse you.”

It was noon when the telephone rang in the main office. Inspector Besson, who had answered it, called across:

“For you, Maigret. It’s the bloke who’s rung you up three times already. Always about this time.”

Maigret took the receiver.

“Hallo! Jules?”

He recognized the voice as Dédé’s.

“Feeling better now? Back on the job? Tell me, are you free for lunch?”

“Why?”

“Just an idea I had. Ever since the other day I’ve been wanting to take you out to lunch in the country. Don’t be scared. I’ll come and collect you in the jalopy. Not outside the police station, since I don’t much care for those sort of places, but on the corner of the Rue Fontaine. That suit you?”

The poor flautist was going to be left out in the cold once more.

“Tell him I had to go out on important business, that I’ll see him tonight or tomorrow.”

A quarter of an hour later, he was getting into the grey De Dion Bouton. Dédé was on his own.

“Have you any favourite place? Do you like *friture de goujon*? We’ll stop off for a moment first at the Porte Maillot to have one for the road.”

They did indeed go into a bar, and Dédé authoritatively ordered two stiff absinthes, dripped the water drop by drop onto the lump of sugar which slowly dissolved, balanced on the perforated spoon.

He was being gay, with a hint of seriousness in his look. He was wearing his check suit, yellow goose-dirt shoes, a splendid red tie.

“Same again? No. Just as you like. Today, I’ve no reason to want to get you drunk.”

Next it was the open road, then the banks of the Seine, with fishermen in their boats, eventually a little riverside inn, with a garden full of vine-covered arbours.

“We want a tasty little feast, Gustave. First course a good *friture*, of nothing but gudgeon.”

And to Maigret:

“He’ll go and cast the net so he can cook ’em alive for us.”

Then to the landlord:

“What can you offer us after that?”

“A *coq au vin* with beaujolais to wash it down.”

“A *coq au vin*, so be it.”

Dédé seemed to be at home here, went off to prowl round the kitchen, descended to the cellar and returned with a bottle of white Loire wine.

“This is better than any apéritif in the world. Now fill your pipe, while we wait for the *friture*. We can have a chat.”

He felt it necessary to explain:

“The reason why I’ve been determined to see you is that I really like you a lot. You’re not yet rotten, like most of the types from your joint.”

He too was gilding the truth a little, as Maigret well knew. People of Dédé’s sort are terrible gossips, and that’s often what gets them caught. They are so proud of themselves that they nearly always feel they have to talk about what they’ve done.

“Where’s Lucile?” asked Maigret, who had expected to meet her in the party.

“Believe it or not, she really is ill. You know, that girl was mad about Bob. She’d have let herself be chopped into little pieces for him. She’s had quite a shock. At first, she refused to leave the Rue Brey, having the idea that she would keep seeing his face everywhere around her. Yesterday, I persuaded her to go to the country. I drove her down there. I’ll be going to collect her. But enough of that. We’ll probably talk about it by and by.”

He lit a cigarette, and breathed its smoke out slowly through his nose. The wine was sparkling in the glasses, the breeze rustling the young foliage of the arbour; the landlord could be seen standing in his punt, studying the water before casting his net.

“I dare say you’ve been curious enough to take a look at my record, and you’ve been able to see that I’ve never got my feet badly wet. The odd job here and there, all right. I’ve copped six months twice and I’ve sworn that that would be enough.”

He was drinking to help himself get going.

“You’ve read the papers?”

And, when Maigret nodded:

“They’re as smart as they come. If you’d seen Lucile! She turned as pale as a sheet. She’d have given anything to go and

rout them out, tear their eyes out. I calmed her down. I kept saying to her:

“ ‘What good will that do?’

“At playing a dirty game they take a lot of beating, you must admit. And if I ever get that crooked-nosed fellow, Richard what’s his name, in a corner without a cop in sight, I give you my oath I’ll gladly knock his face in.

“He’s coughed up fifty thousand and thinks he’s in the clear. Well, between ourselves, and saving your profession, I can tell you he’s not through with it. It’ll catch up with him one of these days, sooner or later. There are all kinds of bastards in the world. He’s the kind I just can’t stomach.

“What about you?”

“They’ve not let me go on with the case,” Maigret replied.

“I know. That’s what I’ve been paid for.”

“They forced you to keep your mouth shut?”

“They told me I could just lie low and I’d get my free pass.”

Which meant they would close their eyes to Dédé’s peccadilloes, forget about Maigret’s being hit on the head and make no effort to discover where the forty-nine thousand francs came from, that were found in Dédé’s wallet.

“What gets my goat is the butler’s little game. Do you believe it?”

“No.”

“Good! If you had, you’d have dropped in my estimation. Since somebody must have fired the shot, they might as well pin it on the flunkey. Who do you think pressed the trigger? This is just a cosy chat, isn’t it? Mind you, if you tried to make use of what I’m telling you, I’d swear I’d never breathed a word. To my way of thinking, it was the girl.”

“That was my idea too...”

“Except that, in my case, I’ve got good reason for thinking so. I’ll say this, though; if she did shoot Bob, it was by mistake. It was her brother she was intending to shoot.

Because those two loathe each other like poison, in a way you only find in families like theirs.

“You never knew Bob, more’s the pity. He was the nicest lad you could hope to meet. How he looked down on them all!

“But not unkindly though. He hadn’t an ounce of unkindness in him. He was above that sort of thing. He despised them so much, they merely made him laugh.

“When the lassie started fluttering around him...”

“How long ago was that?”

“In the autumn. I don’t know who tipped her off. It was common knowledge that Bob was to be found in a bar in the Avenue de Wagram about half past five, after the races.”

“Did she go there?”

“Indeed she did! And without her veil. She told him who she was, that she lived in the Château d’Anseval, was interested in him, would be glad to have him visit her.”

“Did he sleep with her?”

“You bet he did! He made the most of her. Even took her to the hotel in the Rue Brey you’ve been to. To see how far she would go, you follow? He was a good-looking lad. But she, she wasn’t the sort of doll to go into a hotel like that just for the fun of it.

“Come to that, she had no more feelings than a concrete wall. He didn’t hide anything as far as Lucile was concerned. It was no use her being jealous of all the women that passed through his hands! Here’s our *friture*. You must tell me what you think of it.”

He was able to eat as he talked and he didn’t deny himself either pleasure, nor that of caressing the second bottle which had been set in front of them.

“Don’t try to understand. Bob himself, who with all due respect was cleverer than both of us put together, took some time to see how things stood. What surprised him most was her keenness to marry him.

“She made the proposal. Including his not needing a job, and getting so much a month as living expenses, and all. He gave her full rein. He imagined that she was bitten with the idea of being called the Comtesse d’Anseval. There are people like that. They buy themselves a château. Then they start wanting to have the family name, to buy up the ancestors. That was how Bob explained it.”

He looked Maigret full in the eyes and declared, happy to be able to surprise him:

“Well, it wasn’t that at all.”

He was crunching the crisp gudgeon, gazing now and then at the Seine, where barges slowly came past and started hooting several hundred yards from the lock.

“Don’t try and work it out. You won’t succeed. Bob couldn’t believe his ears when he found out. Yet he knew the family history by heart. Do you know whose idea the marriage was? The old man’s!”

He glowed with triumph.

“That was worth coming to lunch at Bougival for, wasn’t it? You’ve heard tell of that horny old man who wanted to leave his house and his pictures to form a museum? Then listen to the rest of it; it’ll give you a good laugh. Mark you, I don’t know the whole story. Not even Bob knew the whole story. It seems the old fellow, who started as a pedlar in the country, used to long to have grandchildren of genuine nobility.

“You see what I’m getting at? It was a kind of revenge on his part. Because the Ansevals, so it seems, weren’t ever nice to him. They sold him the château and the farms. They retired to a discreet distance. Only they never once invited him to dinner, or even lunch.

“So, in his will, he put some clauses which upset the whole family.

“His daughter was still alive when he died, but those sort of people, with their millions, take a long-term view.

“On the death of that daughter, the shares were to be divided in two lots: fifty-one per cent for the young miss and forty-

nine per cent for Crooked-Nose. Seems that makes a lot of difference: it gave the majority vote, as they say, to the girl.

“Myself, I’ve not had much education. Let’s leave it at that. This was due to happen when she became twenty-one.”

“Next month,” said Maigret.

“I’m having a second helping. Too bad if there’s no room left for the *coq au vin*. What were we saying? Oh, yes! But there was one other little matter. If the girl married an Anseval, then she received all the shares, on condition that she gave her big brother an income equivalent to his holdings.

“That meant he would have nothing further to do with the coffee business, the château, etc. The Balthazars, the Gendreaus, would have become Ansevals and be descended from the Crusaders.

“Bob knew all about that sort of game, and you can’t guess how comic he thought it was.”

“Did he accept?”

“What do you take him for?”

“How did he hear about it?”

“From the brother. And now you can see what stupid reasons can lose a man his skin. Crooked-Nose Gendreau is no fool. He’s got no inclination, like his father, to waste his time in clubs or run after the street-walkers in the Rue de la Paix. He too wants to be the boss.”

“I’m beginning to see.”

“No. You can’t possibly, since Bob didn’t see right away. He asked him to come and pay him a visit in his office. Apparently it’s like a sacristy, with carved wood on the walls, gothic furniture, a portrait reaching from the floor to the ceiling, showing the old man looking as if he’d buy the head off your shoulders.

“If you ask me, out of all that family, it’d always be the old man I’d have got on with best. Bob used to say he was the nastiest bastard he’d ever met. Just a way of putting it, seeing he was dead. Anyway...

“Next thing, big brother starts producing his goods. He asks Bob if he has decided to marry his sister. Bob replies that he’s never had any intention of doing so.

“The other chap retorts that he’s making a mistake, that it would be the best solution for all concerned.

“And why would it be the best solution? Because he, Richard Gendreau, would slip his sister’s husband a pretty packet. As much as he cared to have. On one condition, that he would trot his sister around the world a bit, amuse her, make her lose her taste for business.

“You getting there this time?

“Bob answers that he doesn’t care for that sort of job.

“Then the crooked-nose rotter announces that it’s so much the worse for him, that it may easily cost him dear.

“When I think that you were ready to have me chucked in gaol for making that slug fork out fifty smackers! I’m not blaming you. You couldn’t know.”

They were enveloped in a wonderful aroma of *coq au vin*, and Dédé, despite what he had said earlier on, still had a healthy appetite.

“Just taste this beaujolais and tell me if it wouldn’t have been a shame to deprive me of little blow-outs like this, and put me on a diet of beans.

“Do you know what that villain had up his sleeve? I’ve told you Bob was a good chap, but I’ve never made out he was a little saint. Like anyone else, he sometimes found himself short of cash. He’d known lots of swells ever since he was a boy. So every now and then, for a lark, he used to imitate their signatures on cheques or other bills.

“There was nothing dishonest about it. The proof is that the people didn’t complain or else they sorted it out afterwards.

“Well, Jules, old man, the villain of the piece had bought up, God knows how, a whole collection of these documents.

“ ‘*If you don’t marry my sister I’ll have you put inside. If, when you have married her, you don’t play straight, I’ll have*

you put inside.'

"A real devil! Even more of a devil than the old man!

"I can promise you, Bob was sorry he'd ever serviced the kid and got himself mixed up in this business.

"As for the wench, she couldn't wait. She wanted the wedding straight away, before she was twenty-one. She used to send him express messages, telegrams. She made one date after another to meet him.

"Sometimes he went, others he didn't. Most often he didn't turn up and she used to come and dig him out in the Rue Brey, where she'd wait at the corner of the avenue, not caring whether she was taken for some quite different kind of girl.

"Lucile got to know her well."

"When you drove Bob to the Rue Chaptal, on the night of the 15th..."

"He had decided to have done with it, to give her a piece of his mind, tell her he wasn't for sale, neither to her nor to her brother."

"He'd asked you to wait for him?"

"Not exactly, but he didn't think he'd take long over it. Wing or leg? You should have some more mushrooms. Gustave picks them himself on the hill-side and bottles them."

Maigret was feeling perfectly at ease and the beaujolais, after the dry white wine, doubtless contributed to it.

"You're wondering why I'm telling you all this?"

"No."

"You know why?"

"Yes."

Or at least he felt he did. Dédé had too much on his chest to be able to keep quiet about it. Here, he was running no risk. Besides, he had his "free pass".

But, to do him justice, he wasn't proud of himself. This luncheon was a means of setting his conscience at rest. A

means, too, of showing how dirty some people could be and proving fairly decent himself, by contrast.

For a long time to come, that lunch at Bougival was to keep returning to Maigret's mind, and the memory of it may have prevented his jumping to certain rash conclusions.

"As for what happened up in that room, I've no idea."

No more had Maigret, but it was already becoming more easy to reconstruct. He would have needed to know whether Richard Gendreau was supposed to have been at home. Maybe, that night, he should have been at his club, or in some particular place or other?

Maybe again—and it was in character—Bob himself had made him come upstairs. Why not? Perhaps he wanted to tell them both just what he thought of their little intrigues.

"For a start, the wedding's off."

Maigret, who had never seen him, was beginning to form an idea of his character and even of his appearance.

"I have no wish to sell a name which I don't even bother to use myself."

For if, around the Place des Ternes and on the racecourses, certain people called him the count, most of those who knew him were under the impression that it was a nickname and were ignorant of his real name.

Had Lise Gendreau thrown a fit of nerves, protested her honour? Had her brother lost his temper?

"You shut your mouth! What's more, I'm going to tell your sister about the little scheme you thought up."

Did he have time to do so? Or had the other man attacked him at once?

Hundreds and thousands of people who drank Balthazar coffee and, like Madame Maigret, stuck into albums those little pictures of every species of flower, never dreamt that their morning coffee had been the gage of a fight in the Rue Chaptal.

A vicious fight, echoes of which were probably heard through the door by a flunkey.

The two men had doubtless come to blows. Perhaps they had been rolling on the ground.

Was Richard Gendreau armed? He was certainly the sort to shoot someone in the back.

“If you ask me, it was the girl who fired the gun. Not intending to kill him. She was obviously scared out of her wits. The first thing she did, which she must have regretted afterwards, was to open the window and call for help. Unless the window was already open? I must say I didn’t notice.

“You see, I wonder whether in the end she wasn’t really gone on Bob. It’s the way things happen. She began with an eye to the main chance. Then she got hooked. Not sensually. I’ve told you already that she’s got no more feeling in her than a lump of wood. But he was so different from the cold fish she usually met...

“If you ask me, when she saw Bob was getting the worst of it, or that her brother was trying to pull a dirty blow across him, she lost her head. She fired. Unluckily she wasn’t a good shot. She got Bob full in the belly. What say we have another bottle? It’s not a bad little wine for a few sous. There we are, Jules, old man!

“When I saw the bloke banging on the gate, trying to get in, I skedaddled; later I came back, but there was nothing more to see. I thought it best to clear off.

“We thought it over, Lucile and I. There was still the hope that Bob would come back, or that we’d hear he was in hospital somewhere.

“In the end I tracked down Gendreau in his office. That’s how I know what the old boy looked like.

“Wasn’t it better that someone should make something out of it?

“He forked out almost straight away, so that I felt sorry I hadn’t suggested a hundred thousand instead of fifty.

“The rotten bastard!

“You came along just in time, when we were about to do a bunk. You must admit we’d have been fools to get ourselves caught.

“Your health, old man!

“They’ve squared things just how they want them. I’m getting wise to them. It turns my stomach to meet one of their delivery vans in the street, with the horses all dolled up and the coachman smarmed up on the seat.

“Landlord! Some coffee, but not Balthazar.”

He had to drink it, however, for there was no other brand in the house.

“What muck!” he muttered between his teeth. ”Thank God we’re going to live in the country.”

“With Lucile?”

“She hasn’t said no. We’ve got fifty grand, or near enough. I’ve always dreamt of running a bistro by the river, something along the lines of this one, where one’s customers are one’s pals. It’ll be hard to find because it mustn’t be too far from a racecourse. Tomorrow I’m going to have a drive round Maisons-Lafitte. That’s where I’ve parked Lucile.”

He looked a little ashamed, and added hurriedly:

“Don’t go thinking we’ll be as good as gold just because of that!”

It lasted a week. Each morning the bell summoned Maigret into the superintendent’s office, and he gave him the report. Each morning Le Bret opened his mouth as if to say something, but only to look away again.

They didn’t exchange a word, apart from routine matters. Maigret was more serious than before, almost heavier, although he was no fatter. He didn’t take the trouble to smile, and he was perfectly aware that he was a living reproach to Le Bret.

“Tell me, my lad...”

It was the beginning of May.

“What date is your examination?”

The famous course which he had been studying the night when the flautist burst into his office, into his life.

“Next week.”

“Do you think you’ll pass?”

“I think so.”

He was still cold, almost abrupt.

“Guichard told me it was your ambition to join the Quai des Orfèvres.”

“That was true.”

“Isn’t it still?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think you’ll be more at home down there, although you’re valuable to me here. I think I’ll put in a word for you.”

Maigret, his throat tight, didn’t utter. He was sulking. At heart, he was still angry with them, all of them, his superintendent, the Gendreaus, the people from the Sûreté, perhaps even Guichard, for whom he had felt something of the veneration in which he’d held his father.

If, however, Guichard...

They must have been right, he realized in a vague fashion. A scandal would have done no good. Whatever happened, Lise Gendreau would have been acquitted.

What then?

Wasn’t it life itself that he was really angry with, and wasn’t he at fault in not understanding it?

He wouldn’t allow himself to be bought. He wasn’t prepared to be indebted to Le Bret for anything at all.

“I’ll wait my turn,” he managed to murmur.

The next day he was summoned to the Quai.

“Still angry, my boy?” the big chief asked him, laying a hand on his shoulder.

He couldn’t help exclaiming, petulantly, like a small boy:

“It was Lise Gendreau who killed Bob.”

“Maybe.”

“You knew?”

“I suspected it. If it had been her brother, Louis wouldn’t have been the scapegoat.”

The windows were open on to the Seine. Tugs, pulling their strings of barges, were sounding their hooters before passing under the bridge, and lowering their funnels. Trams, buses, cabs, taxis, were going across the Pont Saint-Michel in an endless line, and the pavements were gay with women in bright dresses.

“Sit down, old chap.”

The lesson he learned that day, given in a fatherly tone, didn’t figure in the official police manual.

“Do you follow? Cause as little trouble as possible. What good would come of it?”

“The truth.”

“Which truth?”

And the big chief finished up by saying:

“You can light up your pipe again. On Monday you’ll join Chief-Inspector Barodet’s squad as an inspector.”

Maigret didn’t then know that one day, twenty-two years later, he would meet Lise again, though under another name, an aristocratic Italian name, that of her husband.

Nor that she would receive him in the Balthazar Coffee offices, still unchanged—he knew them only through a man called Dédé—when he would at last set eyes upon the portrait of the old man.

“Chief-Inspector...”

The chief-inspector was himself.

“I need hardly ask you to be discreet...”

By this time it was no longer called the Sûreté, but Paris Police Headquarters.

And he would be dealing with what, in official language, were termed investigations undertaken on behalf of private families.

“I’m afraid my daughter takes after her father...”

She herself was cool and collected, like old Balthazar, whose full-length portrait hung behind the chair.

“She let herself become involved with an unscrupulous individual who’s taken her off to England, where he’s obtained a marriage licence. He must be prevented, at all costs...”

No, he didn’t then know that he would once again have the honour of the Balthazars in his hands.

He was twenty-six. He was in a hurry to run and tell his wife the news.

“I’m joining the Chief’s Squad.”

But he would have to leave that till later. Justin Minard was waiting for him in the street.

“Bad news?”

“Good news. I’ve been promoted.”

The flautist seemed more excited than he was.

“You’re leaving the station?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Shall we drink to it?”

At the Brasserie Dauphine, just round the corner from the Quai, some detectives from the building were having a drink, taking no notice of the two men who were sipping sparkling wine and seemed to be in such high good spirits.

A few days, and they would know one of them at any rate. Maigret would be their equal. He would come in here as if he belonged. The waiter would greet him by name, and would know what to fetch him.

When he returned home that night, he was drunk. A dozen times the flautist and he had seen each other to the corner of the street.

“Your wife...” Maigret objected.

“It’s of no importance.”

“Shouldn’t you be with your band?”

“What band?”

He made a lot of noise going upstairs. The door opened, and he announced solemnly:

“Meet a new inspector of the Chief’s Squad.”

“Where’s your hat?”

Putting his hand to his head, he realized he must have left it somewhere.

“Just like a woman! Now listen... listen carefully, it’s very important... very important, do you hear? It’s no thanks to the superintendent... They had their eye on me, and I never knew it... Do you know who told me...? The big chief... He told me... I can’t repeat everything he told me, but he’s a real father... a real father, you understand...?”

Then she brought him his slippers and made a cup of strong coffee.

“Stud Barn”

Tumacacori, Arizona

September 30, 1948

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[scanned anonymously in a galaxy far far away]

[for a complete bibliography of all 103 episodes of *The Maigret Saga*, check out [Steve Trussel's amazing fan site](http://www.trussel.com/f_maig.htm) at http://www.trussel.com/f_maig.htm]

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